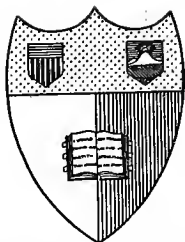


PRESENT-DAY  
AMERICAN POETRY

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H. HOUSTON PECKHAM

STUDIES IN LITERATURE



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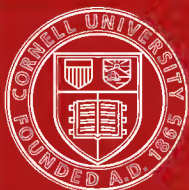
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PRESENT-DAY  
AMERICAN POETRY  
*and Other Essays*

By

H. HOUSTON PECKHAM



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TO  
GEORGE SUMMEY, JR.

WITHOUT WHOSE AID AND ENCOURAGEMENT THE FIRST  
OF THESE ESSAYS WOULD HARDLY HAVE BEEN  
PUBLISHED



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PRESENT-DAY AMERICAN POETRY  
AND OTHER ESSAYS



## PRESENT-DAY AMERICAN POETRY

**I**F you ask the average intelligent person his opinion of the status of present-day American poetry, you will probably be told one of two things: either that our generation boasts of no first-rate American poet; or that we have excellent poets, but that this is peculiarly an age of prose, and that therefore these poets are unappreciated. The erroneousness of both of these opinions it shall be my purpose to show in this article. In other words, I shall endeavor to establish the thesis that in this twentieth century we Americans are blessed with our quota of noteworthy singers, and that if we are not all devotees of the muse, we have at least as much regard for her as the people of most bygone ages have had.

"This is an age of prose!" wail the unhonored poets. And they point to the fact that second and third and fourth rate novels sell much better than the best poetry written; that the average magazine nowadays uses verses only to fill in blank spaces at the bottoms of pages; and that to the professional joke-writer the word "poet" has about as high a connotation as the word "tramp" or the word "lunatic". But these pessimists forget that every age of modern history has been "an age of prose"; that few of the great poems of the past have been best-sellers; that in the two most poetic periods which English literature has seen, Sir Philip Sidney and Percy Bysshe Shelley, respectively, felt called upon to defend the divine art of poesy against

public contumely; and that Shelley and Keats suffered as much ridicule as any two men who ever wrote rimes.

Yes, perhaps this is an age of prose. Doubtless many of us find golden dollars more alluring than golden daffodils, and commerce more attractive than art. But the person who is continually emphasizing this fact forgets that from time immemorial, the people of western Europe, especially the Anglo-Saxons, have been a race of traders and will undoubtedly continue to be so to the end of their racial existence. He also forgets that if this is an age which loves material gain it is also an age of child-labor laws, sanitary commissions, social settlements, societies for the prevention of cruelty to children and dumb animals, well organized municipal charities, and various other humanitarian activities. Well, then, if it is idealism which makes for appreciation of the fine arts, surely we possess as high an idealism as did the Elizabethans, who used to flog women, hang petty thieves, and take keen delight in the torture of dumb brutes. Materialistic we twentieth-century Americans may be; but in this respect we are not so different from our ancestors as we sometimes imagine ourselves. Like our progenitors, we trade and traffic a great deal; but, like them also, we enjoy some of the finer things of life too. If anything ails us at all, it is self-consciousness. Like the little girl who felt herself grown too big to play with dolls but surreptitiously fondled dolly in a secluded corner, we scoff at poetry in public and enjoy it in secret. Our emotions are much more guarded, of course, in the theatre than in our private libraries.



We like poetry, even contemporary poetry; but we are not willing to admit it. Instead of lauding our present-day bards, we assume an unbending attitude and declare that we hunger for really great poetry, but protest that the verses of our living writers are so puerile, so trivial that we cannot condescend to notice them.

And at this juncture it devolves upon me to point out the falsity of the assertion that present-day American poetry is lacking in merit. That, as is often stated, the United States to-day boasts no poet comparable to Alfred Noyes, John Masefield, or William Watson is doubtless true. But what of it? Fifty years ago it might have been stated with equal truth that no poet on this side of the Atlantic was nearly so great as Tennyson or Browning. Surely the fact that contemporary American poetry is inferior to contemporary British poetry does not prove that our poetry is in a state of decline. At most it proves merely that we have not yet outgrown our youngness and crudeness—have not yet become as cultivated as our mother nation.

“But,” insist the pessimists, “What names has the past twenty years brought forth, worthy of mention in the same breath with the names of Bryant, Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Poe, Holmes, Whitman, Lowell, and Lanier?” In this connection, permit me to suggest that history has not yet had time to fix the ultimate standing of such names as Stedman, Aldrich, Stoddard, Gilder, Hovey, Moody, and Cawein; and allow me to invite your fair, respectful consideration

of the work of such living writers as Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edith M. Thomas, Edwin Markham, Henry Van Dyke, Josephine Preston Peabody, and Percy Mackaye.

Without attempting to fix the status of the chief living American poets as compared with their predecessors, I shall call attention to the well known and freely admitted fact that from a technical standpoint the minor American poetry of to-day is much better than that of a generation or two ago. Whittier once remarked that if he were to venture south of Mason and Dixon's line, he would be hanged for his bad rimes. He might have added, had he been a good prognosticator, that some of his most characteristic verses were so badly written that they would hardly find acceptance in any reputable twentieth-century magazine.

But what of the charges most frequently made against contemporary American poetry?

One charge is that our most representative poetry is totally lacking in originality, both of form and of subject matter. Our poets, it seems, sing of love, of ethics, of nature, of great public events and crises, just as poets were wont to sing long before there was an American nation. Moreover, instead of inventing new verse-forms, our latter-day bards cling to such old forms as blank verse, the sonnet, the quatrain, and so on. Well and good, granting that all this is so, is this necessarily a point against our current poetry? Does the fact that in the remote past such poets as Homer and Sappho and Theocritus discovered the true poetic

subjects prove that modern poets, in order to be as great as they, must invent new subjects? Would it be fair to say that just because Petrarch wrote sonnets nearly three hundred years before Milton was born, the sonnets of Milton are therefore inferior to those of the Italian poet? Does the fact that Walt Whitman is by far the most strikingly original poet that America has yet produced necessarily prove that he is the greatest of our bards? Verily, emulation may be as true a virtue as originality; but were it not, we could easily give the lie to the allegation that present-day American poetry is totally lacking in originality. To do this, we have only to call attention to a few such titles as the following, selected at random from the leading magazines of the past ten years: "From A Skyscraper", "On A Subway Express", "Pittsburgh", "The Song of the Wireless Telegraph", "The Power-plant", "Airships".

A second charge brought against contemporary American poetry—a charge which flatly contradicts the first—is that much of our poetry is altogether too original, or rather that it is so bizarre that it has little to commend it except originality. As Edwin Arlington Robinson remarked, in a recent interview with Joyce Kilmer in the New York Times magazine section: "More than ever before, oddity and violence are bringing into prominence poets who have little besides these two qualities to offer the world." If Mr. Robinson, in making this statement, had in mind the *vers libre* of such poets as Amy Lowell, Edgar Lee Masters, and Ezra Pound, his judgment is doubtless correct.

This, however, is entirely inadequate as a wholesale condemnation of modern American poetry, for the simple reason that *vers libre*, whatever merits or demerits it may possess, is by no means typical of the best or most characteristic tendencies in our latter-day verse.

A third charge brought against contemporary American poetry is that our bards are mere pleasing rimesters or dainty word-painters, who play us delectable little tunes or paint us pretty pictures, but have no sterner stuff, no philosophy, to offer us. In answer to this charge, let me quote Edith M. Thomas's sonnet, "Music", assuredly an exquisite picture, but quite as assuredly a pregnant bit of philosophy to all who realize the charm of nature and of harmony:

The god of music dwelleth out of doors,  
 All seasons through his minstrelsy we meet,  
 Breathing by field and covert haunting-sweet:  
 From organ-lofts in forests old he pours  
 A solemn harmony; on leafy floors  
 To smooth autumnal pipes he moves his feet,  
 Or with the tingling spectrum of the sleet  
 In winter keen picks out his thrilling scores.  
 Leave me the reed unplucked beside the stream,  
 And he will stoop and fill it with the breeze;  
 Leave me the viol's frame in secret trees,  
 Unwrought, and it shall wake a druid theme;  
 Leave me the whispering shell on nereid shores:  
 The god of music dwelleth out of doors.

In the same connection let me cite Louis Untermeyer's "Voices," a piece which appeared several years ago in *Hampton's*:

All day with anxious heart and wondering ear  
 I listened to the city; heard the ground  
 Echo with human thunder, and the sound  
 Go reeling down the streets and disappear.  
 The headlong hours in their wild career  
 Shouted and sang until the world was drowned  
 With babel-voices, each one more pro-  
     found . . . .  
 All day it surged—but nothing could I hear:

That night the country never seemed so still:  
 The trees and grasses spoke without a word  
 To stars that brushed them with their silver wings.  
 Together with the moon I climbed the hill  
 And in the very heart of silence heard  
 The speech and music of immortal things.

The erroneous idea that present-day American poetry is devoid of vigorous philosophy probably arises from the fact that our poets no longer moralize after the manner of Whittier or Longfellow—that is, they have long ago ceased to spoil good descriptions or narratives by writing postscripts in the form of one-stanza homilies.

Another arraignment made against our contemporary verse is that it is singularly lacking in quotable lines or passages. This arraignment is probably fair, except as applied to Dr. Van Dyke's verses; but far from proving our twentieth-century poetry to be weak, it proves rather, I should say, that our verse is becoming so exquisitely unified that to take from a poem any integral part of it is to destroy the whole fabric. The two sonnets which I have just quoted will serve as illustrations of this point.

Still another stricture which the captious frequently make upon our latter-day poetry is that no really noteworthy poems have been written for more than a generation. Let me remind those who make this complaint that Edwin Markham's "The Man with the Hoe", William Vaughn Moody's "Ode in Time of Hesitation", Robert H. Schauflier's "Scum o' the Earth", Vachel Lindsay's "General Booth Enters Heaven", and Robert Frost's "North of Boston" are all products of the past twenty years.

A final objection made to current American verse is that our chief poets are producing nothing but short lyrics. At first glance, this appears to be a truly valid objection. We are still waiting for the great American epic, and there is no indication that we shall not continue to wait for a long time. None of our younger poets seem inclined to attempt any work of like proportions to Mr. Alfred Noyes's "Drake, An English Epic"; and it must be admitted that the foremost of our older living singers are lyrists, and lyrists exclusively. But here is a very important fact that we must not lose sight of: two of our younger bards, Josephine Preston Peabody and Percy Mackaye, have within the past decade brought out some plays of surpassing excellence. Hauptmann in Germany, D'Annunzio in Italy, Rostand in France, and Stephen Phillips in England have given the literary world nothing finer in a dramatic way than Mr. Mackaye's "Sappho and Phaon", "Fenris the Wolf", "Jeanne D'Arc", and "The Scarecrow"; and Mrs. (Peabody) Marks's "Marlowe" and "The Piper".

Turning, however, from a negative to a positive consideration of our subject, what, specifically, are some of the praiseworthy qualities in present-day American poetry? First of all, let me call attention to the generally conceded fact that our later poets have attained to a perfection of form unknown in the days of Longfellow and Lowell, and only approached, not equalled, by such transition poets as Stedman, Lanier, and Aldrich. As examples of exquisite craftsmanship, note these two stanzas from the late Madison Cawein's "Serenade":

The pink rose drops its petals on  
 The moonlit lawn, the moonlit lawn;  
 The moon, like some wild rose of white,  
 Drops down the summer night.  
 No rose there is  
 As sweet as this—  
 Thy mouth, that greets me with a kiss.

The lattice of thy casement twines  
 With jasmine vines, with jasmine vines;  
 The stars, like jasmine blossoms, lie  
 About the glimmering sky.  
 No jasmine tress  
 Can so caress  
 As thy white arms' soft loveliness.

Here we have an intricacy of arrangement, a subtleness of melody, an exquisiteness of euphony, and an accuracy of meter which remind us forcibly of Lanier; but Cawein's poem is totally free from that straining of diction, that artificiality, that groping for rimes, which mars some of Lanier's most characteristic work.

Closely akin to this perfection of form is the striking, superlative beauty which some of our recent poems possess. As illustration of this, I shall quote another Cawein passage, this one from "Vagabonds":

Your heart's a-tune with April and mine a-tune with  
June,  
So let us go a-roving beneath the summer moon:  
Oh, was it in the sunlight, or was it in the rain,  
We met among 'the blossoms within the locust lane?  
All that I can remember 's the bird that sang aboon,  
And with its music in our hearts we'll rove beneath the  
moon.

. . . . .

It will not be forever, yet merry goes the tune  
While we still go a-roving beneath the summer moon:  
A cabin, in the clearing, of flickering firelight  
When old-time lanes we strolled in the winter snows  
make white:  
Where we can nod together above the logs and croon  
The songs we sang when roving beneath the summer  
moon.

For winsome, compelling tunefulness those lines may fittingly be mentioned in the same category with some of the most musical lines of Shelley, William Blake, and Swinburne.

Another noteworthy characteristic of present-day American poetry is the fulness, vividness, and accuracy with which it deals with nature. Note, in this connection, a couple of stanzas from Dr. Van Dyke's delightful little poem, "Spring in the South":



Bluejays fluttering, yodeling and crying,  
 Meadow-larks sailing low above the faded grass,  
 Red-birds whistling clear, silent robins flying,—  
 What has waked the birds up? What has come to  
 pass?

. . . . .

Now on the plum the snowy bloom is sifted,  
 Now on the peach the glory of the rose,  
 Over the hills a tender haze is drifted,  
 Full to the brim the yellow river flows.  
 Dark cypress boughs with vivid jewels glisten,  
 Greener than emeralds shining in the sun,  
 Who has wrought the magic? Listen, sweetheart,  
 listen!  
 The mocking-bird is singing. Spring has begun.

For vividness of imagery and variety of sensations, these lines are hardly surpassed, even by Tennyson's best nature poetry or Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis".

Still another notable quality of our recent poetry is its effective conciseness. Brian Hooker, in an article on "Present American Poetry", in the August, 1909, number of *The Forum*, bewails the fact that nowadays our magazines are seldom willing to buy poems of more than thirty lines' length; but when we find a dramatic theme treated with the powerful terseness which characterizes Cawein's poem "Lynchers", we may well be grateful to the magazine editors for their policy of insistence on brevity. Here is the poem:

At the moon's down-going, let it be  
 On the quarry hill with its one gnarled tree. . . . .  
 The red-rock road of the underbrush,

Where the woman came through the summer hush.  
 The sumach high, and the elder thick,  
 Where we found the stone and the ragged stick.  
 The trampled road of the thicket, full  
 Of footprints down to the quarry pool.  
 The rocks that ooze with the hue of lead,  
 Where we found her lying stark and dead.  
 The scraggy wood; the negro hut,  
 With its doors and windows locked and shut.  
 A secret signal; a foot's rough tramp;  
 A knock at the door; a lifted lamp.  
 An oath; a scuffle; a ring of masks;  
 A voice that answers a voice that asks.  
 A group of shadows; the moon's red fleck;  
 A running noose and a man's bared neck.  
 A word, a curse, and a shape that swings;  
 The lonely night and a bat's black wings. . . .  
 At the moon's down-going, let it be  
 On the quarry hill with its one gnarled tree.

A final characteristic which I remark in the American poetry of our day is the realism and vividness with which contemporary subjects are treated. As social documents of their age, some of the most characteristic of twentieth-century American poems are scarcely surpassed in world literature. "Lynchers" illustrates this fact, and the fact is more broadly illustrated by James Oppenheim's "Saturday Night", three stanzas of which I quote herewith:

The lights of Saturday night beat golden, golden over  
     the pillared street,  
 The long plate-glass of a Dream-World olden is as the  
     footlights shining sweet.  
 Street-lamp—flambeau—glamour of trolley—comet-

trail of the trains above,  
Flash where the jostling crowds are jolly with echoing  
laughter and human love.

The leather of shoes in the brilliant casement sheds a  
lustre over the heart;  
The high-heaped fruit in the flaring basement glows  
with the tints of Turner's art.  
Darwin's dream and the eye of Spencer saw not such a  
gloried race  
As here in copper light intenser than desert sun glides  
face by face.

This drab washwoman dazed and breathless, ray-  
chiseled in the golden stream,  
Is a magic statue standing deathless—her tub and  
soap-suds touched with Dream.  
Yea, in this people, glamour-sunnied, democracy wins  
heaven again;  
Here the unlearned and the unmoneyed laugh in the  
lights of Lover's Lane.

Why, then, all this hue and cry about the decline of American poetry? If the American muse really is in a state of decline, she is an amazingly robust, healthy invalid. As a matter of fact, our present-day poetry, instead of showing signs of decadency, is exceptionally good. More than that, there is every reason why it should be, and—despite Macaulay's dogmatic assertion that in an age of enlightenment there will be little poetry—no reason why it should not. If, as is often said, we are a people occupied with prosaic, materialistic pursuits, then so much the more reason why we should turn, for recreation, to an emotional art such as poetry. Furthermore, our bigness, our variedness,

our cosmopolitanism, and our lessons from the past furnish us with a field of inspiration beside which even that of the Elizabethans was small indeed. And better still, like every healthy young nation which is ripening into maturity, we are growing in artistic consciousness, improving in aesthetic taste. Influential persons are showing a marked interest in poetry; new magazines devoted exclusively to verse are being established; poetic prizes are being offered annually; theatrical managers are displaying an increased willingness to produce worthy poetic plays from the pens of native writers; and best of all, decidedly promising new poets are appearing, the excellent work of some of our youngest bards, notably James Oppenheim, John G. Neihardt, Sara Teasdale, Louis Untermeyer, Joyce Kilmer, William Rose Benét, and John Hall Wheelock, attesting to this fact.

I have purposely avoided comparing any individual present-day poet or poets with Longfellow, Poe, Whitman, Lowell, or any other bard who graced the "golden" period of American literature: not because I fear to meet the issue, nor because I dislike to lay myself open to the charge of heresy; but because the achievements of the present can be viewed with much more discernment and in much truer perspective thirty years from now than now. The old proverb about distance and enchantment is as true here as elsewhere. We have only to let the future sit in judgment as to the relative merit of our contemporary poetry, and if we live to be grey-beards we shall doubtless see young critics unconsciously following tradition

and solemnly trying to explain why the poetry of 1946 is not so great as that which 1916 produced.

## THE FOREMOST POET OF OUR DAY

THE heart of the child and the mind of the man are in him," says Hamilton W. Mabie in speaking of Alfred Noyes, the greatest of living English poets; and Mr. Mabie could not have made a statement more fortunate; for rarely indeed does one find so happy a combination of youthful spontaneity and mature insight as the work of Mr. Noyes exhibits.

I have used an out-and-out superlative in speaking of Mr. Noyes: I have referred to him as the greatest living English poet. I have no apologies, no retractions, to make; for with all due regard for the highly creditable work of William Watson, John Masefield, Laurence Binyon, A. E. Housman, Henry Newbolt, John Drinkwater, W. H. Davies, and (formerly; but, alas, not now) Rudyard Kipling, I can think of no English poet of this generation who can be considered the equal of Alfred Noyes.

Now let us see just what claims Mr. Noyes has to the high place which I would accord him. Here are a few of the accomplishments which this young man of thirty-six years already has to his credit: more verse and more good verse than any of his contemporaries have brought out; the biggest English poem and only real epic since the completion of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King"; the finest Spenserian stanzas, by a long way, since those of Byron and Shelley; one of the best poetic dramas of recent times; and—some of the most exquisite word-melodies that merry old England has

ever heard. But these are only a few of the attainments of Mr. Noyes. Any adequate commentary on his work must note also that he is a poet of marvelous range, both in matter and in manner; that he is a follower of the best traditions of English poetry, yet thoroughly modern and strikingly original; and that he is philosopher as well as artist, prophet as well as poet.

Mr. Noyes's first collection of poems, "The Loom of Years", appeared in 1902, and since that time he has brought out an average of about one volume a year. His fecundity is simply astounding, scarcely a month going by that at least one new poem from his pen does not appear in some magazine. Brian Hooker made a very clever remark when he said of Noyes: "He writes with a sort of divine garrulity—a poetic prodigal, shaking a sunlit mane and singing loudly and sweetly across the morning." That so prolific a poet should sometimes write some very bad verses would seem almost inevitable; but if Mr. Noyes has yet written anything bad, he has not allowed it to find its way into print. If we needed any proof of the average quality of his work, we could point to the fact that more than half of his poems are first published in that pre-eminently respectable literary magazine, *Blackwood's*. And as to his best work—but that is another story, of which we shall have a great deal to say presently.

American readers are so familiar with Mr. Noyes's recent work—particularly "Tales of the Mermaid Tavern" and "The Lord of Misrule" collection—that I purpose, in this paper, to confine myself mainly to his earlier writings.

The most ambitious piece of work which Mr. Noyes has yet attempted, and in many respects his best work, is "Drake, an English Epic". This poem is a blank-verse narrative in twelve books, and deals with the exploits of Sir Francis Drake, reaching its climax, of course, in the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The well-known facts of Drake's early piratical methods, his cruise around Cape Horn, and his final glorious victory against overwhelming odds, stand out prominently in the poem. Queen Elizabeth does not figure so conspicuously in the piece as might have been expected; but if Mr. Noyes's portrait of her is slight, it is at least excellent as far as it goes, and every patriotic Englishman will applaud him when he enthusiastically exclaims: "Elizabeth, whose name is one forever with the name of England."

Under the most auspicious of circumstances, the writing of an epic poem is an exceedingly hazardous undertaking, and in this day of the short-story and the rapidly moving novel it becomes doubly risky. How wonderful is it, then, that Mr. Noyes has made a success of "Drake"! The secret of his success, however, is not hard to ascertain. The fact is, he has performed one of the most difficult feats imaginable: he has preserved epic dignity and grandeur through twelve long books, and has, at the same time, written a tale which is as gripping as any best-selling novel of the season. Moreover, he has enriched the pages of his epic with descriptions of amazing loveliness. Take for instance the words which Drake speaks as his little fleet, bound upon its great world-journey, passes the coast of his native Devonshire:



“Ah, my heart cries out  
 We shall not find a sweeter land afar  
 Than those thyme-scented hills we leave behind!  
 Soon the young lambs will bleat across the combes,  
 And breezes will bring puffs of hawthorn scent  
 Down Devon lanes; over the purple moors  
 Lavrocks will carol and the plover cry,  
 The nesting peewit cry; on village greens  
 Around the May-pole, while the moon hangs low,  
 The boys and girls of England merrily swing  
 In country footing through the flowery dance;  
 Roses return: I blame them not who stay,  
 I blame them not at all who cling to home.  
 For many of us indeed shall not return,  
 Nor ever know that sweetness any more.”

Even the most cursory notice of Mr. Noyes's epic would be incomplete without some mention of the love-story of Drake and Bess of Sydenham. The objection has been made that this episode is irrelevant and therefore injurious to the unity of the poem as a whole; but the critics who make this objection forget that the epic is bound by no such laws as is the classic drama—that, on the other hand, “the whole business of life comes bodily into the epic.” To my mind the account of Drake's love is one of the very best features of the poem; for it serves to remind us that Drake was something more than “El Draque”, the terror of the Spaniards. It shows us that the great admiral had a very real and beautiful human side, and that when he thought of the glories he was winning for his and England's Queen, he thought also of another Elizabeth, “She, too, . . . a queen, though crown'd

with milk-white Devon may alone, and queen but of one plot of meadowsweet."

From the very beginning of his poetic career, Mr. Noyes has given evidence of strong dramatic proclivities. Especially has this been true in "Drake" and in his short narrative poem "Silk o' the Kine". It was not till 1911, however, that he brought out his first play, "Sherwood". This play takes for its theme the Robin Hood legend, and accepts the tradition that Robin was in reality the Earl of Huntingdon. For sheer poetic beauty and delicacy, "Sherwood" rivals the best plays of Tennyson, and although it has not had a stage presentation, there seems to be no reason why it should not prove as thoroughly actable as any of the dramas of the late Stephen Phillips. Among the familiar characters we meet in "Sherwood" are ("Maid") Marian Fitzwalter, Will Scarlett, King John, Queen Elinor, and Richard Coeur de Lion. Oberon, Titania, Puck, and the other fairies are there too; and it is difficult to say when old Sherwood Forest is most captivating—when its verdure matches the jerkins of the lads in Lincoln green, or during those hours when the witchery of blue moonlight and fairy-dances broods over it. "Sherwood" is romantic to the core, a fact which explains the charming but none-the-less obvious air of unreality pervading the piece as a whole. One and all, the characters flit through the scenes, not as human beings, but as beautiful or monstrous dream-things. Only one of the characters, the cautious, timid Fitzwalter, is of the earth earthy, and he is minor. Robin Hood is the incarnation of romantic heroism,

and his lady-love, Maid Marian, is the quintessence of superlative loveliness. King John is a demon, not a flesh-and-blood man. One of the finest characters in the play is Shadow-of-a-leaf, the Fool, who lives the life of earth-folk, yet has power to visit fairyland and commune with King Oberon and the other fairies. While on one of his visits to fairyland, Shadow-of-a-leaf discovers that grave dangers beset his earthly sovereign, Robin Hood, and his heart feels a mighty desire to warn Robin; but to warn Robin would be to break his fairy vows, and this would mean eternal banishment from fairyland, and ultimately the death that all mortals die. Beautiful indeed is the scene in which Shadow-of-a-leaf sacrifices his future in an effort to save his master. The gates of fairyland are closed against him forever, but as Oberon touchingly says:

“We fairies have not known or heard  
What waits for those who, like this wandering Fool,  
Throw all away for love. But I have heard  
There is a great King, out beyond the world;  
Not Richard, who is dead, nor yet King John;  
But a great King who one day will come home  
Clothed with the clouds of heaven from His Crusade.”

It is, perhaps, by his big achievements in the realm of epic and dramatic poetry that Mr. Noyes has won an undisputed title to a place in the ranks of major poets; but it is as a lyrist that he is most delightful. In poetic technique, he is the heir of all the ages, and needless to say, he has learned something of worth from every one of the great English singers who have

gone before him. Especially valuable have been the lessons which he has learned from those most subtle of melodists, Tennyson and Swinburne. The fruits of Mr. Noyes's learning are evident: already he has surpassed in some respects the two great Victorian word-wizards. Month after month this wonderful new singer breaks forth into a fresh song fraught with melody such as England has seldom heard. Month after month he reveals in some new way the musical possibilities of our comparatively unmusical Anglo-Saxon tongue. As Brian Hooker well says: "The fairy godmothers at his christening were very drunk indeed; but they were rosily and gloriously drunk, with as yet no foreshadowing of any Morning After." I have tried many times to find out the secret that underlies the marvelous sweetness of Mr. Noyes's song, but at each attempt I have been baffled. Sometimes it seems to me that his winsomeness must be due to the fact that his variety of measures is almost as limitless as his poetic productivity—that, in other words, he rarely repeats himself in the use of rhythm and rime-scheme. Sometimes, too, I am struck forcibly by the fact that he has the very rare faculty, for an English poet, of handling the trochee and the dactyl with quite as much ease and grace as he manages the iambus and the anapest. And sometimes I am astounded and bewildered at the consummate artistry of his syllabifications, vowel-harmonies, feminine endings, and initial-rimes. But of one thing I am satisfied, and that is that back of his skill as a craftsman lies the all-important fact of his spontaneity. Like the

Elizabethan lyrists, he sings out of pure delight in his song, and of the English bards who have lived since the days of Gloriana, he stands with Shelley, the laureate of clouds and rainbows, and with William Blake, that captivating eighteenth-century madman, as one of the most spontaneously joyous and joyously spontaneous of singers. The horns of elfland and the harps of the gods seem to accompany Alfred Noyes in some of his glorious paeons, and when he sings of Robin Hood, the fairy-bells ring a rapturous obligato.

Sherwood in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake?  
 Grey and ghostly shadows are gliding through the  
 brake;  
 Shadows of the dappled deer, dreaming of the morn,  
 Dreaming of a shadowy man that winds a shadowy  
 horn.

Robin Hood is here again: all his merry thieves  
 Hear a ghostly bugle-note shivering through the leaves,  
 Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,  
 In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Merry, merry England has kissed the lips of June:  
 All the wings of fairyland were here beneath the moon;  
 Like a flight of rose-leaves fluttering in a mist  
 Of opal and ruby and pearl and amethyst.

Merry, merry England is waking as of old,  
 With eyes of blither hazel and hair of brighter gold:  
 For Robin Hood is here again beneath the bursting  
 spray  
 In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

I wish that I had space to quote all of that magical word-symphony, "The Barrel-organ", but I shall have to be content with repeating three stanzas of it:

Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;

Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)

And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's wonderland;

Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)

The cherry-trees are seas of bloom and soft perfume and sweet perfume,

The cherry-trees are seas of bloom (and oh, so near to London!)

And there they say, when dawn is high and all the world's a blaze of sky

The cuckoo, though he's very shy, will sing a song for London.

The Dorian nightingale is rare and yet they say you'll hear him there

At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London!)

The linnet and the throstle too, and after dark the long halloo

And golden-eyed tu-whit, tu-whoo of owls that ogle London.

Of Swinburnean warmth and sweetness is Mr. Noyes's "Silk o' the Kine", yet its gorgeous coloring is as healthy as the coloring of Swinburne is hectic. The quotation of a single magnificent passage, that in which is related how Sorch the Singer one day espied the beautiful maiden Eilidh bathing in the dazzled sea, will show well the lyrical quality of "Silk o' the Kine":

For once in the warm blue summer weather  
 He lay with his harp in the deep sweet heather,  
 And watched her white limbs glimmer and gleam  
 Out, far out, through the sea's eternal dream,  
 Swimming with one bright arm like a wild sunbeam  
 Flashing and cleaving the warm wild emerald tide  
 That trembled and murmured and sobbed at her naked  
     side,  
 And folded and moulded her beauty in sun-soft gold,  
 And swooned at her sweetness, and swiftly revived into  
     cold  
 Clear currents of emerald rapture, again and again  
 Scattered a glory of kisses around her that broke into  
     rainbows and rain,  
 As over and under her blossoming breasts they rippled  
 and glistened and rolled.

When one starts to dilate upon the beauties of Mr. Noyes as a lyrist, one is tempted to repeat pages and pages of his verse. One more quotation, however, that of a sonnet, must conclude this topic. Mr. Noyes does the sonnet so well that I wish he would do it more frequently. His sonnet "Venus Disrobing for the Bath", which I shall quote, is as finely wrought as a piece of Grecian statuary:

Over the firm young bosom's polished peaks  
     The thin white robe slips dimly as a dream  
     Slowly dissolving in the sun's first beam:  
 Far off the sad sea sighs and vainly seeks  
 The abandoned shell that bore her to the Greeks  
     When first she slumbered on the sea-blue stream,  
     And in the dawn's first faint wild golden gleam  
 The white doves woke her with their soft red beaks.

From breast to sunny thigh the light silk slips  
On every rose-white curve and rounded slope  
Pausing; and now it lies around her feet  
In tiny clouds: now timidly she dips  
One foot; the warm wave, shivering at her sweet.  
Kisses it with a murmur of wild hope.

I have already intimated that not only in the manner of his song, but also in its content, Mr. Noyes is a poet of broad range. He is interested in such widely diverse material as classical mythology, modern ethics, the Christian religion, art, Continental poetry, present-day social types, twentieth-century problems, Japanese lore, old English ballad-legends, European history, American scenes, and, of course, the experiences and emotions of the individual. With equal freshness and enthusiasm he sings of a lost childhood and a London street-scene, of a village maid and a great national event, of an old beggar fiddler and Napoleon Bonaparte. Perhaps the most advisable way to treat the subject of Mr. Noyes's scope would be to proceed in a negative manner and make a list of the themes which he does not celebrate in song, but even the making of such a list would have its difficulties; for experience should teach us, if it has not done so already, that Mr. Noyes is a poet of surprises, and that if we single out any one thing as lying entirely outside his range, he is pretty likely to do that very thing in one of next month's magazines. One thing which we have learned not to expect from him is an interest in nature as a thing in itself or as a great revelation. His imagery is gorgeously rich, and in two of his biggest works,



"Sherwood" and "The Forest of Wild Thyme", background is the all-important element; but he certainly does not have the Wordsworthian viewpoint toward nature. Still, we can make no dogmatic statement even on this point; for in "The Heart of the Woods", one stanza of which I shall give, he strikes a note which is almost if not quite transcendental:

Heart of me, Heart of me, Heart of me, beating, beating  
afar,  
In the green gloom of the night, in the light of the rosy  
star,  
In the cold sweet voice of the bird, in the sigh of the  
flower-soft sea,  
Sure the Heart of the woods is the Heart of the world  
and the Heart of Eternity,  
Ay, and the passionate Heart it is of you and me.

The most serious charge which has yet been brought against Alfred Noyes is that he is a facile, clever borrower, who has no new message, strikes no original note. The absurdity of this charge is proven by the fact that among the few who make the charge there is the most violent disagreement as to the fountain-head of Mr. Noyes's inspiration. One critic avers that Mr. Noyes's fondness for refrains and alliterations, his delight in the mediaeval, his exuberant melody, and his frank treatment of sex passion and the nude, stamp him at once as nothing more or less than a belated Pre-Raphaelite. A second critic is equally certain that whatever else Mr. Noyes may be, he is not a Pre-Raphaelite—that, on the other hand, the flawless

accuracy of his meters and the smoothness and impeccable exactness of his diction, not to mention his intense British patriotism, are distinctively Tennysonian characteristics. And then a third critic comes along and gravely announces that Mr. Noyes, in his fervid enthusiasm, is a disciple of Shelley and of no one else. All of these critics are right, and all of them are wrong. As I have already pointed out, Mr. Noyes has been wise enough to follow the best traditions of English poetry, and so of course he has found, in the Pre-Raphaelites, in Tennyson, and in Shelley, many things worthy of emulation; but the Pre-Raphaelites' blindness to anything but the purely esthetic, Tennyson's provincial Englishism, and Shelley's lack of balance are three weaknesses of which Mr. Noyes has not been guilty.

Alfred Noyes is not a poetic anarchist like Walt Whitman, nor even a revolutionist like Swinburne or Sidney Lanier; but this in no way proves that he is lacking in originality. As a matter of fact, his art is as truly a melting-pot for the methods of old poets as the American nation is a melting-pot for the natives of old countries, and in each case the crucible brings forth a product which, though wrought of old material, is itself altogether new. But enough of generalities! What, specifically, has Mr. Noyes done to show that he is a leader as well as a follower? Well, for one thing—and for this alone we should be everlastingly grateful to him—he has shown the spondee to have many possibilities which no one heretofore dreamed that it possessed in English. He has, moreover, revived

several splendid old measures which have been lying neglected since Elizabethan days, and which, but for his advent, would probably have remained in obscurity. But consummate artist though he is, his greatest originality does not lie in his technique. The tremendous appeal which he has had and is having on both sides of the Atlantic must be attributed, in the final analysis, to his fresh, big, healthy optimism. In this day, when we are beginning to weary of Ibsenism, and Pineroism, and Sudermannism, and the other morbid "isms", Mr. Noyes's clear, courageous voice is indeed as refreshing as the song of the first robin in March. His is no sappy, sentimental optimism of the sort that drives strong minds to the other extreme; but is a sane, virile optimism which can give, in no uncertain tones, the reason for the faith that is within it. He has a message of hope for our generation, and God knows we need it, God knows we need a sight of the rainbow, after the storm of pessimism which has poured upon us for the past twenty-five years!

Alfred Noyes now appears in a most worthy role: that of a Prophet of Universal Peace. This is a unique as well as a worthy role; for it must be remembered that nearly all the bards, ancient and modern, except the Great Bard of nineteen centuries ago, have found the clang and glitter of war one of the most fascinating of themes. Peace, which Tennyson timidly hinted at in "Locksley Hall", Mr. Noyes fearlessly makes the burden of his song. And this new peace-song, coming as it does when Briton and Teuton, Gaul and Slav, writhe in the agony of mortal combat, is a peculiarly

welcome song. "The Sceptre with the Dove" is the name of the ode which Mr. Noyes wrote on the occasion of King George V's coronation, and in "Forward" he makes another strong plea for peace. Here are his words:

Re-union in the truths that stand  
 When all our wars are rolled away,  
 Re-union of the heart and hand  
 And of the prayers wherewith we pray.

Re-union in the common needs,  
 The common strivings of mankind;  
 Re-union of our warring creeds,  
 In the one God that dwells behind.

Then—in that day—we shall not meet  
 Wrong with new wrong, but right with right:  
 Our faith shall make your faith complete  
 When our battalions re-unite.

Forward!—what use of idle words?—  
 Forward, O warriors of the soul!  
 There will be breaking up of swords  
 When that new morning makes us whole.

Mr. Noyes's peace-plea, however, is no weakling's plea. He is, of course, as firm as any other Englishman in the conviction that the menace of Prussian militarism must be wiped out at all costs. This sentiment he has given voice to in several vigorous poems since the outbreak of the present war; and in "New Wars for Old" he clearly shows that the peace-at-any-price idea is one which he abominates. I quote this poem in full:

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?

Over us burns a star  
Bright, beautiful, red for strife!  
Yours are only the drum and the fife,  
The golden braid and the surface of life,  
Ours is the white-hot war.

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?

Ours are the weapons of men!  
Time changes the face of the world:  
Your swords are rust and your flags are furled;  
And ours are the unseen legions hurled  
Up to the heights again.

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?

Is there no wrong to right,  
Wrong crying to God on high?  
Here where the weak and helpless die,  
And the homeless hordes of the city go by,  
The ranks are rallied to-night!

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?

Are ye so dazed with words?  
Earth, heaven, shall pass away  
Ere for your passionless peace we pray!  
Are ye deaf to the trumpets that call us to-day,  
Blind to the blazing swords?

Mr. Noyes as a prophet appears nowhere to better advantage than in the stirring lines of "The Trumpet Call":

# I

Trumpeter, sound the great recall!  
Swift, O swift, for the squadrons break,  
The long lines waver, mazed in the gloom!

Hither and thither the blind host blunders!  
 Stand thou firm for a dead Man's sake,  
 Firm where the ranks reel down to their doom,  
 Stand thou firm in the midst of the thunders,  
 Stand where the steeds and the riders fall,  
 Set the bronze to thy lips and sound  
 A rally to ring the whole world round!  
 Trumpeter, rally us, rally us, rally us!  
     Sound the great recall.

## II

Trumpeter, sound for the ancient heights!  
 Clouds of the earth-born battle cloak  
 The heaven that our fathers held from of old;  
 And we—shall we prate to their sons of the gain  
 In gold or bread? Through yonder smoke  
 The heights that never were won with gold  
 Wait, still bright with their old red stain,  
 For the thousand chariots of God again,  
 And the steel that swept through a hundred fights  
 With the Ironsides, equal to life and death,  
 The steel, the steel of their ancient faith!  
 Trumpeter, rally us, rally us, rally us!  
     Sound for the sun-lit heights!

. . . . .

## V

Trumpeter, sound for the splendor of God!  
 Sound the music whose name is law,  
 Whose service is perfect freedom still,  
 The order august that rules the stars!  
 Bid the anarchs of night withdraw,  
 Too long the destroyers have worked their will,  
 Sound for the last, the last of wars!

Sound for the heights that our fathers trod,  
 When truth was truth and love was love,  
 With a hell beneath, but a heaven above,  
 Trumpeter, rally us, rally us, rally us,  
 On to the City of God.

What shall we say of the future of this truly remarkable poetic genius who has lived but little more than half of his allotted three score years and ten? Will he, like Swinburne and Matthew Arnold, suffer an atrophy and presently cease to produce? Or will he, like Wordsworth, continue to write, but decline markedly with the advancing years? Or will he, like Browning and Tennyson, go on growing and ripening to the end of a long career? These are, of course, questions no one can answer. But this much we may say with certainty: were Alfred Noyes to become songless to-morrow and never utter another note, that which he has already achieved would still be sufficient to give him, for all time to come, an enviable position among English poets. And we may declare, with equal certainty, that Alfred Noyes, the man of thirty-six, sings with quite as much of the "first fine careless rapture" as did Alfred Noyes, the lad of twenty-two, and with a great deal more skill and insight. And I think we may add, with perfect confidence, that as long as Mr. Noyes continues to produce, whether that be for one year or for ten years or for forty years, he will be, as he is now, too conscientious a craftsman ever to turn out a crude or slovenly piece of work.

The great danger which lies before Alfred Noyes—a danger against which, to all appearances, he will

have to guard most earnestly—is that in his zeal for his creed, he will forget that he is a poet and turn preacher. More than one discerning critic has expressed grave apprehension lest Mr. Noyes should cease to draw gruesome pictures of war and sin, and spend his time railing against them. Should these apprehensions prove to be well grounded, it would be deplorable; but I for one have too great a faith in Mr. Noyes's acute artistic sense, to believe that he will ever so far forget the function of the poet as to fall into the habit of abstract moralizing.

I am often fond of picturing in my mind Macaulay's hypothetical traveller from New Zealand. Just now I can see that imaginary gentleman walking among the ruins of some London street, Piccadilly perhaps. He walks briskly, until his attention is suddenly arrested by the graven letters, "Twentieth Century", upon some moss-grown corner-stone. Then all at once his face is aglow. "Twentieth century!" he murmurs, "twentieth century! Ah, yes, that was the age that produced that wonderful poet, Alfred Noyes. Like Prospero and Shadow-of-a-leaf, he knew the road to Fairyland, the road that leads through the forest of sweet purple thyme, among the waving ferns and the bluebells and the pale moonflowers. And by his grace, many weary souls, many 'poor dark mortals' travelled that magic road to its end, and entered in at the Ivory Gates."

I have anticipated the storm of wrath which my remarks must inevitably arouse in many conservative readers—those readers who are firm in the conviction



that antiquity has a monopoly upon great art, and that poetic genius is something which is necessarily far removed from this workaday twentieth century. To all such readers I have only to say that I have no apologies to make: I am ready to take the consequences of my rash enthusiasm. I realize fully how dangerous a thing it is to attempt to rate contemporary artistic genius; for I am very well aware of the fact that art which may be hailed by one age with unbounded admiration may be treated by a succeeding age with indifference or even contumely. But to me it is utterly unbelievable that any age endowed with the love of truth, the love of beauty, or the love of love, can turn a deaf ear to the song of Alfred Noyes.

## WANTED: A NEW SPIRIT IN LITERARY CRITICISM

**T**HE more I view the present state of American letters, the more I am convinced that the pressing need of our day is not for new and greater creative geniuses than we have now, but for an entirely new spirit in literary criticism.

The present tendency of our critics of literature is clearly to disparage rather than to appreciate our contemporary writers. And when I speak of our critics of literature, I do not mean simply the professionals, whose judgments appear on the printed page. I mean quite as truly that much larger and more influential company of critics, the average readers, whose estimates are passed informally on the street, in the home, at the club.

The other day a college professor said to me: "I don't think we have any good American poets at present, do you?" I answered his question with another question: "Well, what do you think of the work of such writers as Henry Van Dyke, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edith M. Thomas, George Sterling, Josephine Preston Peabody, Percy Mackaye, and Edwin Markham?" And thereupon he confessed that he knew practically nothing of these writers—had, in fact, been so busy reading Lowell and Emerson and Walt Whitman that he had had neither the time nor the inclination to see what our poets have been doing during the past twenty years or so. And there

we get at the root of the whole matter. We have been so long in the habit of supposing that good literature is bounded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean and was ended with about the year 1892, that to voice a contrary opinion is heresy of the rankest sort. How, we ask ourselves unconsciously, can we suppose that we Americans have a real present-day literature, when we are told in the school room and at the reading-circle and from the lecture-platform and in almost every magazine that we take up, that all great and glorious things were written in the past, or that if anything worth while is being written now, it is being done in artistic old Europe, not in crude, provincial, upstart, materialistic America?

My plea, you perceive, is for a critical spirit which while rendering unto the great past all due homage, will not be too fogeyish, snobbish, or ignorant to give the present fair treatment. And my belief, as I have hinted, is that a true knowledge of the facts will beget this new spirit.

To speak more concretely, suppose we begin our campaign of self-education by looking over the field of realistic fiction. This is a good field to begin with, as no one will deny its importance. Most of the world's great novelists—Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith, Flaubert, Balzac, Daudet, and Tolstoi, for example—have been realists. And now let us see what American writers belong in the same category. William Dean Howells, Edith Wharton, Thomas Nelson Page, Theodore Dreiser, Robert Herrick, Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman, and Margaret Deland are a few contemporary

Americans who may be mentioned, among others, as writers who deal not with Fairylands or Arcadias, but with various phases of life as it is. And where shall we find a similar group of American writers in any by-gone period? I cannot answer that question except by repeating the question itself. Where *shall* we find a similar group? When we have named Irving, Cooper, Hawthorne, Poe, Simms, Holmes, Mrs. Stowe, Mark Twain, and Bret Harte, we have come perilously near to exhausting our nineteenth-century fiction list. And who in that estimable company, except Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Harte, could be by any stretch of the imagination possibly regarded as realistic? Or suppose we put the matter in this way: the future historian, sociologist, or anthropologist who wishes to inform himself as to the manners and customs of the early twentieth century can, by reading Mrs. Wharton, learn much about the gilded set in New York; and a perusal of some of Mrs. Freeman's most characteristic work will teach him a great deal about the simpler country folk of New England and New Jersey. But where shall we find anything really illuminating about American life as it was in the middle of the nineteenth century? Assuredly, not in any mid-nineteenth-century novel that you or I can readily mention!

In a similar connection, a brief examination of the historical romance will not be amiss here. When James Fenimore Cooper wrote "The Spy", he doubtless wrote the best purely historical romance brought out in the so-called "Classical" period of American literature; but in any comparison of the various Revolu-

tionary stories, no sane, fair-minded reader would think of maintaining that "The Spy" is equal to Winston Churchill's "Richard Carvel" or S. Weir Mitchell's "Hugh Wynne", either in historical accuracy or in literary style.

Now let us glance for a moment at our recent dramatic poetry. Percy Mackaye and Josephine Preston Peabody have, within the past few years, written plays which were highly meritorious from a literary standpoint and eminently successful from a stage point of view. Few, probably, will dispute the first part of my statement, and no one, certainly, will quarrel with the second part. The work of Mrs. (Peabody) Marks and Mr. Mackaye belongs, however, to the present century. What of the nineteenth century? Yes; what, indeed, of the nineteenth century? I have read plays by Longfellow—very pretty plays—but I never saw or knew of the professional stage presentation of any of them. I have, likewise, heard of the stage success of the blank-verse dramas of John Howard Payne; but I have never read any of those dramas, and no professor of literature or other wise counsellor ever told me that it was important that I should read any of them.

In a paper of so limited scope as this, I cannot attempt to discuss all forms of poetry; but for the sake of further illustration, suppose we give a brief consideration to nature poetry, an important form since the days of Thomson. William Cullen Bryant was, of course, a nature poet of high merit; but I wonder whether the critics of the future, the critics who can

view the twentieth century as dispassionately and discerningly as they view the nineteenth, will find that Bryant was a keener observer or a clearer interpreter of natural phenomena than the late Madison Cawein. Personally I very much doubt it.

Another poetic form which it might be well to mention is the sonnet, a form which has been used extensively by a majority of great modern bards. Longfellow was admittedly the foremost of our nineteenth-century sonneteers; but I should like to have any one point out to me specifically wherein his sonnets excel the sonnets of Lloyd Mifflin, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Louis Untermeyer, or William Ellery Leonard.

And while we are speaking of fiction, the drama, and poetry, we cannot omit mention of the essay and criticism. Suppose we grant that as a leader of thought Emerson has never been surpassed or even equalled by any later American writer. What then? I have yet to hear anybody assert that either Emerson or Holmes was more readable or a better stylist than Hamilton Wright Mabie, Henry Van Dyke, Samuel M. Crothers, or Walter Pritchard Eaton, or that the criticisms of either Lowell or Poe were sounder, more original, or more significant than those of George E. Woodberry or the late Thomas R. Lounsbury.

When we reduce the matter to specific terms in this fashion, we do not find people much disposed to argue with us. About the strongest argument we are likely to meet with is something like this: "But you are comparing present-day stuff with the classics of our literature! There were giants in the old days, and *ab*

*hoc sequitur*, we have nothing but pygmies now." In other words, Jubilo is greater than Jubilum, and hodge is superior to podge; because the world has always so regarded them!

I am well aware of the fact that this habit of belittling the achievements of the present and extolling those of the past is no new thing—that, on the other hand, it is based upon a very old tradition, and that a great artist is seldom appreciated as much in his own day as by posterity. Somewhat less than a hundred years ago—to cite a specific case—when Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats were giving to the world some of their most brilliant songs, the critics of England were loudly bewailing the fact that Pope, the incomparable Pope, was dead, and that the golden age of poesy, the age of perfect couplets, was passed away. Verily, a poet is not without honor, save in his own generation!

An English station-porter, when asked once by an American traveller why British railways do not give checks instead of continuing the antiquated and stupid system of pasting labels upon luggage, replied naïvely: "Well, sir, it never 'as bean done." Obviously, however, the fact that honoring the writers of one's own day is a thing which "never 'as bean done" is no reason in the world why we should not be the first generation to break away from a foolish prejudice.

But, object many, if we honor those whom we consider the best writers of our day, how can we be sure that posterity will accept our judgments? Was not Dryden once considered a greater poet than Chaucer;

and did not Byron, in the opinion of his contemporaries, stand head and shoulders above Shelley and Wordsworth?

Well and good! but why should we care what posterity may think of the geniuses of the early twentieth century? As Mr. G. H. Mair, an eminent British critic, has pointed out, why should the possibilities that our great-grandsons may reverse our literary judgments of our contemporaries deter us from thinking for ourselves? To quote Mr. Mair's words (*English Literature: Modern*, by G. H. Mair, p. 237): "No notion is so destructive to the formation of a sound literary taste as the notion that books become literature only when their authors are dead. Round us men and women are putting into plays and poetry and novels the best they can or know. They are writing not for a dim and uncertain future but for us, and on our recognition and welcome they depend, sometimes for their livelihood, always for the courage which carries them on to fresh endeavor. Literature is an ever-living and continuous thing, and we do it less than its due service if we are so occupied reading Shakespeare and Milton and Scott that we have no time to read Mr. Yeats, Mr. Shaw or Mr. Wells. Students of literature must remember that classics are being manufactured daily under their eyes, and that on their sympathy and comprehension depends whether an author receives the success he merits when he is alive to enjoy it."

And this suggests the one remaining phase of the matter which presents itself to my mind at this moment. When we follow a tradition, be it a good tradition or a



bad one, we seldom analyze our motives, seldom ask the why or wherefore. Nevertheless, I cannot help wondering whether in our time-honored critical spirit there is not a sub-conscious voice which argues somewhat in this fashion: "Our present-day writers may have merit; but, bless you! if we praise them, we shall certainly spoil them. To pat a living author on the back is too much like telling a vain little girl that she is pretty, or a conceited little boy that he is smart." And then two pictures inevitably appear to my mind and I see William Collins, one of the few great poetic geniuses of the eighteenth century, and Keats, high priest in the Temple of Beauty. I see the former broken-heartedly burning poetic treasures that his Pope-mad contemporaries would not read; and I see the latter wasting away to his untimely end, his countenance the sad manifestation of a soul fraught with heaven knows how many beautiful songs unsung. And thereupon I feel like exclaiming passionately with Shelley:

Most musical of mourners, weep anew!

Not all to that bright station dared to climb:  
 And happier they their happiness who knew,  
   Whose tapers yet burn through that night of time  
   In which suns perished. Others more sublime,  
 Struck by the envious wrath of man or god,  
   Have sunk, extinct in their refulgent prime;  
 And some yet live, treading the thorny road  
 Which leads, through toil and hate, to Fame's serene  
   abode.

We cannot afford to neglect the good poets and novelists, the worthy dramatists and essayists, who live

and move and have their being in this twentieth century of ours. We cannot, moreover, afford to pout if as a literary people we do not quite rival all the European nations. We may not have any Galsworthy or Alfred Noyes, any Maeterlinck or Sudermann; but why, in the name of common sense, need that make us despondent? Why can we not remember that this is no evidence of American literary decadence—that fifty years ago we had no lyricist the peer of Browning or Tennyson, no philosopher as big or as brilliant as Carlyle, no realistic novelist as great as Balzac or George Eliot? A new critical spirit! by all that is just and reasonable, a new critical spirit! We have no cause to be ashamed of our best contemporary American writers; but if we neglect them, if we fail to honor them, we have much cause to be ashamed of ourselves.

## THE RETURN TO OBJECTIVISM IN POETRY

POETRY is the most despised of all the fine arts. That fact is so obvious, so patent, that nobody attempts to dispute it. We may view the fact with sorrow, or we may view it with indifference; but at all events we recognize it. In the comic weeklies the poet is invariably an unkempt, unshorn, unbalanced creature who has no business outside the lunatic asylum. "Poetry," remarked a wag a few years ago, "is not a pursuit: it's a disease." In the slang parlance of the vulgar, the poet is spoken of as an individual who "has bats in his belfry" or who "isn't all there." In real life the poet may or may not be as thus depicted; but at any rate he is so much a *persona non grata* that he is kept busy apologizing for his art or complaining that he is not appreciated. A prominent British bard of our day writes of "The Muse in Exile", and a prominent American contemporary, in a querulous sonnet, finds "every other Art considered more than Song's high holiness." Broadly speaking, nobody loves a poet.

Now beside this fact stand two equally evident facts: first, that the other arts are not despised at all; and secondly, that poetry was not always thus held in contempt. Speaking about the other arts, let us note for instance painting, which is loved by many and respected by all save the vulgar; or music, with its idolized Carusos and Kubeliks; or the novel, with its tons and tons of best-sellers; or acting, an art whose

leading exponents are almost as devoutly worshipped as are great military heroes. And speaking of the world's change of attitude toward the poet, we cannot well lose sight of the fact that Vergil and Shakespeare were among the most prosperous and most respected men of their times; that Chaucer and Dante held high public positions; that seven cities are said to have claimed Homer; and that these men were honored because of their art, not in spite of it. In this same connection, too, we shall do well to recall the tradition that when Thebes was sacked, once by Pausanias and later by Alexander the Great, the house of Pindar the poet was each time spared, along with the temples of the gods. The world was formerly more kind to its bards than now.

Instead of complaining, however, about the present situation, instead of repeating the trite and meaningless assertion that ours is an age of prose, had we not better inquire into causes? If we do, our inquiries will lead us to easier deductions than we might at first expect. For instance, we may say that music is popular for the very obvious reason that the whole world loves harmony and melody and rhythm; that painting owes its vogue to the well-nigh universal delight in color and in a pictorial reproduction of life and nature; that the wide acceptance of the drama is to be attributed to the fact that men like to mimic and to see others mimicked; and that the popularity of the novel and the romance is easily to be explained by man's love for the telling of a tale.

And along with this comes another easy deduction:

namely, that the comparatively few poets who have tasted the sweets of world-wide applause have been narrative poets. "Why," one might say, "the poets whom you have named as enjoying public esteem—Homer and Vergil and Dante and Chaucer and Shakespeare—were all of them tellers of tales, and they were popular for the same reason that Boccaccio or Fielding or Dickens or any other great story-teller has been popular. That they used meter is of small significance." And one might strengthen one's argument by pointing out that Longfellow, the most popular American poet, is also our greatest narrative poet; and that Tennyson, the most widely honored British poet of the nineteenth century, is to be thought of chiefly in connection with such tales as "Idylls of the King", "The Princess", "Dora", and "Enoch Arden". How easy and plausible such a deduction would be!—yet, unfortunately, how superficial too!

For if we conclude the matter in this way, we shall have to reason that lyrical poetry must ever be regarded with contumely, and that the matter with poetry now is that the lyric has been the form most used during the past three hundred years or so. Such a conclusion, however, is obviously too absurd to be accepted for a moment. Note such poems as Pindar's Olympic Odes, Milton's "L'Allegro", Gray's "Elegy", and Keats's "Ode on A Grecian Urn"; and you will at once be reminded that the lyric may have as warm a place in the hearts of people as may any other work of art. Surely, then, it is not because he is a lyrist that the modern poet is despised. Some other explanation must be found.

In this connection, has it never occurred to us that the difficulty is not that poetry has been getting too lyrical, but that until a very recent date lyrical poetry has been getting too subjective? In other words, if we examine Victorian lyrical verse, and Romantic lyrical verse, as well as a great deal of Georgian and Jacobean lyrical verse, shall we not find that a wearisomely large amount of *ego* pervades it? "I celebrate myself and sing myself. *I* am sad because my lover spurns me. I wish *I* could soar and sing as soars and sings the skylark. *I* cannot see beauty as once I saw it—cannot enjoy life as once I enjoyed it. *My* heart leaps joyously at the sight of a rainbow, and dances with the golden daffodils." That is the tone of the modern lyricist. So thoroughly, indeed, is this true that lexicographers tell us the lyric is essentially the expression of the poet's personal feelings, rather than of outward things. And rhetoricians enthusiastically commend this subjective tone. "If you would be a poet, young man," says the professor of literature, "be subjective, be egoistic. Talk constantly about yourself; for it is human nature to be more interested in one's self than in anybody or anything else, and the subject in which you are most interested you can make most interesting to others. By all means discuss those feelings and experiences which are common to the race, but let those feelings and experiences be your own and be treated from your point of view."

The fallacy, however, of this sort of preachment and practice is this: if it is human nature to be primarily interested in self, it is likewise human nature to be

insufferably bored by egoism in others. Let us, for a moment, apply this principle to the other arts. Imagine a painter who executed nothing but portraits of himself! Imagine a romance or a drama or an opera in which the author himself appeared as a lone character! I fancy that Hamlet with Hamlet alone would be quite as unsatisfactory as Hamlet with Hamlet left out.

Now notice some of the great lyrics, some of the lyrics which approach universality in their appeal. Take, for example, Pindar's Olympic Odes, which deal with the victors in some of the great games. Take Milton's "L'Allegro", which has to do with milkmaids and mowers and shepherds, with nibbling flocks and meadows and brooks, with hamlets and country dances and feasting. Take Gray's "Elegy", wherein are recounted the simple annals of the poor and the oblivion that is the lot of the obscure dead. Take Keats's "Ode on A Grecian Urn", wherein we read of Arcadian dales, of the wild ecstasy of pursuing men and fleeing maidens, of soft pipes and happy melodists. And notice, in short, that in each and all of these lyrics the poet is so engrossed in outside things that he says little or nothing about himself.

May we not, then, reasonably assume that the popularity of such singers as Homer and Chaucer and Shakespeare was due only in part to the fact that they were story-tellers? May we not assume that one of the greatest reasons for their wide vogue has been that they dealt not with their little private joys and sorrows, but with outside things, with human activities,

with those subjects which interest men in general? Pause for a moment to think of Homer's immortal "Iliad", and I believe you will readily concede that the personal characteristics of Achilles and Hector and Priam, their virtues and their foibles, are almost as significant as their adventures. Think of Chaucer's delightful "Canterbury Tales", and I daresay you will be impressed quite as vividly with the appearance and general behavior of the nun's priest and the miller and the pardoner as with the tales that they have to tell. Ponder on some of Shakespeare's wonderful dramas, and I feel sure that such personalities as Shylock and Falstaff and Lady Macbeth will stand out in your mind more clearly than will any of the great master's plots. A poet does not have to be a story-teller in order to touch those chords which will awaken humanity to a glad response. The sooner we realize that, the better. The sooner, too, that the bard realizes that lyrical poetry does not have to be subjective and egoistic, the better for him. The all-important thing is that the literary artist, like the painter and the Thespian, shall be concerned with significant objects and experiences, with those objects and experiences that we, racially, perceive and sense day by day.

One of the most encouraging signs of the times is that our younger lyrical poets are coming to a realization of this. They are awakening to the fact that man's love of rhythm and beauty should give lyrical poetry a standing with the other arts, and that if lyrical poetry falls short of such standing, the fault is not intrinsic, but is due to some cause susceptible of



remedy. And they are, I believe, discovering that this remedy lies in objectivism. Look over a representative list of nineteenth-century lyrics, and what do you find? You find such titles as "Come Not When I am Dead," "My Star", "Were You With Me", "My Hopes Retire," "I Wandered Lonely as A Cloud", "When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be", and "Do You Remember Me? Or are You Proud". If, on the contrary, you examine a few present-day lyrics, you are more likely to meet with such titles as "Lynchers", "The Lights of New York", "The Parade", "Midnight Down Town", "Shop-Girls", "Street-Cleaners", "Sunday in the Park", "The Theatre-Hour", and "The Italian Restaurant". All of which indicates, I think, that our lyrist is becoming less self-centered—are beginning to vie with the genre-painters in their interest in the scenes and activities round about them. Here is a typical objective lyric of the new order, a poem by John Hall Wheelock:

The soft, gray garment of the rushing rain  
 Veils in the lonely Sunday streets afar,  
 The passengers sit dumb within the car—  
 Slow drops drip wearily down the window-pane.

A funeral procession takes its way  
 Across the tracks, the car stands still a space,  
 All eyes are turned and every anxious face,—  
 Save one, that laughs oblivious of delay;

Holding her baby close against her breast,  
 The heart of love, too glad to comprehend,  
 And Life at War with Death until the end  
 The mother throned serene amid the rest.

And here are "City Vignettes", some equally objective stanzas from the pen of Sara Teasdale:

## I

## DAWN

The greenish sky glows up in misty reds,  
 The purple shadows turn to brick and stone,  
 The dreams wear thin, men turn upon their beds,  
 And hear the milk-cart jangle by alone.

## II

## DUSK

The city's street a roaring blackened stream  
 Walled in by granite, thro' whose thousand eyes  
 A thousand yellow lights begin to gleam,  
 And over all the pale untroubled skies.

## III

## RAIN AND NIGHT

The street-lamps shine in a yellow line  
 Down the splashy, gleaming street,  
 And the rain is heard now loud now blurred  
 By the tread of homing feet.

Notice that these tremendously effective lyrics are entirely objective—that the pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my* do not once occur in either of them. Here the poet forgets himself and his own little joys and sorrows to depict something of universal interest.

That this new objective note in poetry has been inevitable, it may well be contended. For it may be reasonably argued that the increasing relative importance of the city as a factor in our modern civilization means perforce that the city will find a greater and greater place in literature, poetry as well as prose; and that when a writer turns his attention to the strenuous and widely diverse activities of a great metropolis, he can scarcely escape being objective. But, after all, that is neither here nor there. The all-important fact is that a change of attitude has come about.

And what have been the results of this change? Is the poetic art actually gaining, from a public standpoint, in respectability? Or am I merely theorizing? Let us see. Within the past four years three magazines devoted exclusively to verse and verse-criticism have been started in this country;—and all three of them appear to be prospering! Another apparently successful venture of rather recent origin is the poetic prize contest which is annually conducted under the auspices of a leading publisher. And if one will take the trouble to examine a few representative college and university bulletins, one will find that our institutions of learning show an increasing disposition to introduce the study of contemporary poetry into their curricula. So it will be observed that the art of prosody is more than holding its own in this twentieth century of ours.

And who are the present-day singers who are popular in the best sense of the word? Who are the bards most widely esteemed by cultured, discriminating readers? Well, there are Mr. Wheelock and Miss

Teasdale, whom I have already quoted. There is Joyce Kilmer, whose treatment of various familiar, everyday themes, is notably objective. There is Louis Untermeyer, who was certainly rather subjective in his youthful "First Love", but whose maturing art—particularly in such pieces as "The City"—shows an increasing tendency to deal with those things which lie outside the ego. There is Vachel Lindsay, whose enthusiasm for such things as the esthetic development of villages will not permit him to think much about himself. And there is James Oppenheim, who is so much interested in East Side types in the great metropolis, that he has scant time to celebrate himself or sing himself.

But let us take a more shining example. Of all the living poets who use our language as a medium of expression the most popular with cultivated readers is probably Alfred Noyes. And to what does he owe his popularity? To narrative poetry? Well, it must be admitted that with "Drake" and "Tales of the Mermaid Tavern", to say nothing of his play "Sherwood" and some of his minor narrative poems, he has gained notable distinction as a story-teller. But if a vote were taken to decide what is the most appealing, most gripping, most human poem Mr. Noyes has yet written, I doubt not that the verdict would be overwhelmingly in favor of that remarkable lyric, "The Barrel-Organ".

And what have we in "The Barrel-Organ"? Not a poet's solitary exultation at the return of spring; not a sensitive lover's whining lament that he has been rejected; not a self-occupied soul's wonder whether his

individual consciousness is to be eternal: but a London street, teeming with life! A barrel-organ plays airs from the operas of Verdi, and all sorts and conditions of men hear. The music changes and ranges like a prismatic glass, and as it passes from mood to mood, the great multitudes—thieves and clerks and butchers, portly business men and athletic college youths, modish society women and haggard “demi-reps”—are transported to that beautiful land where the dead dreams go.

No wonder such a poem, effectively written, approaches universality in its appeal! For here it is not the man-soul, but the world-soul, that speaks. And when the world-soul speaks, whether it speak in terms of a London crowd or in terms of inanimate meadow and grove and stream, the world responds. This is the new poetic viewpoint. This is the return to that objectivism which glorified the work of Homer and Chaucer and the other old masters. This is the movement which should redeem the divine art of poesy from the ill-favor into which it has fallen during recent centuries. Let the gifted singer of the rising generation learn this. Let him learn that his art is inherently noble, and need not be despised. Let him learn that by fleeing the murky prison-house of self-consciousness, he can stand, with his fellow-artists, in the bright sunshine of renown.

## THE NEW FEMINISM IN LITERATURE

ONE hears much about the new feminist movement these days. Indeed, it is a topic so widely discussed that the writer who essays it runs the risk of being wearisomely trite. It is a far cry from the ancient to the modern, and in some respects it is almost as far a cry from the dawn of modern times to these later days. The hairy cave-man cudgeling his chosen mate into a receptive attitude; the genteel Elizabethan baronet flogging his grown daughter; the eighteenth-century vicar dilating upon the evils of giving "decently bred young females" too much book-learning—what a contrast are these to present-day mere man, who in gracious eagerness or in sullen obedience, bows lower and lower to the eternal feminine! Verily, in this era of bachelor girls, lady doctors of philosophy and medicine, suffragists, and militant and non-militant suffragettes, feminism is a much alive movement.

Yet one of the most striking phases of the new movement has been allowed to pass almost unnoticed: namely, the increasing activity of women as producers of real literature. The terms "ancient bard" and "ancient historian" are almost as suggestive of masculinity as "blacksmith" and "hod-carrier" and "bricklayer". Sappho was a great genius, but she was a lonely figure beside Homer and Theocritus and Pindar, Vergil and Horace and Ovid, and the other male singers of olden times. One must go to very

modern history to find record of many literary women. A comparison of eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature affords an amazing contrast, showing how few of the eminent British women of letters flourished prior to about 1800. Compare, for example, the mediocre Fanny Burney or Hester Thrale Piozzi with Mrs. Browning, who was, with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of the two foremost English sonneteers of the Victorian Era. Compare Miss Burney or Mrs. Piozzi with Rossetti's gifted sister Christina; or with Janè Austen, supreme realist of the Romantic Period; or with Mrs. Gaskell, author of the inimitable "Cranford"; or with Charlotte Brontë, creator of the immortal "Jane Eyre", or with George Eliot, perhaps the greatest British novelist of all time.

Even sharper, in this respect, is the contrast between nineteenth and twentieth century American writers. To give a comprehensive list of the leading literary figures of what we may call our "Golden Age", we must, of course, include such names as Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Poe, Holmes, Motley, Prescott, Thoreau, Whitman, Lowell, Parkman, Curtis, Taylor, Aldrich, Stedman, Timrod, Hayne, Lanier, Harte, and Clemens. But where may we find a feminine name worthy of mention in that extensive list? True, there were women writers in the days of our fathers and grandfathers. There was Margaret Fuller, who was certainly a great thinker, but in no sense a great writer. There was Louisa M. Alcott, whose juvenile stories are thoroughly respectable and altogether charming, but fall far short of being dis-

tinative in style, big in purpose, or significant in content. There was Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of a phenomenal best-seller which, everybody now admits, has been ridiculously overrated. There were Lydia Sigourney, Lucy Larcom, and the Cary sisters, estimable ladies who by their pretty inanity and innocuous platitudes rined their way into the hearts of thousands of very nice people. There were Mary J. Holmes, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, and Augusta J. Evans Wilson, perpetrators of some of the most consummate balderdash that ever found its way into cloth bindings. And so one might continue the comparison, did it not become so pitiaibly absurd.

The story of our twentieth-century literature, however, is a very different tale. Try to name a few of our best present-day writers. If you turn your attention to the field of bourgeois local-color realism, you cannot escape the names of Alice Brown, Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman, Mary S. Watts, Dorothy Canfield, and Kate Douglas Wiggin. If you think of interpreters of the life of metropolitan plutocracy and fashion, you will certainly mention Edith Wharton first of all. If you ponder upon creators of unforgettable characters and backgrounds, you will inevitably call to mind Margaret Deland, to whom we are so deeply indebted for *Dr. Lavendar* and *Old Chester*. If you look southward, you will assuredly note Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow. If your chief interest is in the American essay, Agnes Repplier is bound to claim much of your attention. And if you would record the names of our best living poets, you must, beyond the shadow of a



doubt, mention Edith M. Thomas, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Florence Earle Coates, Fannie Stearns Davis, Sarah N. Cleghorn, Anna Hempstead Branch, and Sara Teasdale in lyrical verse, and Josephine Preston Peabody in the poetic drama. So runs the list, until one is tempted to throw up one's hands in dismay and exclaim, "Where are the men of yesteryear?" Of course we have our men writers nowadays too—some highly meritorious ones—but neither you nor I should be eager to assume the task of presenting a male list more impressive than the list which I have just finished. Particularly in the realm of fiction would such a task be difficult. Apropos of this, I recently made an interesting discovery. I went through files of one of our three leading illustrated magazines, a periodical which sells for thirty-five cents a copy. I compared an 1885 volume with a volume for 1910. In the former, I found, only eight per cent of the fiction and thirty-three per cent of the verse was from the pens of women. In the latter, I noted, fifty-four per cent of the fiction and approximately the same percentage of the verse was furnished by women writers. Similar investigations of other standard magazines showed the above figures to be thoroughly representative. And this new trend is by no means confined to the literature of our own country. Witness the success of Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mrs. Alice Meynell, and May Sinclair in England; Emilia Pardo-Bazan in Spain; Ada Negri and Matilda Serao in Italy; Madame de Martel ("Gyp") in France; Gertrude Bosboom-Toussaint and Adele Opzoomer in Holland; Clara

Viebig, Gabriele Reuter, and Ricarda Huch in Germany; Baroness von Suttner in Austria; Amalie Skram in Norway; Alfild Agrell, Matilda Malling, Selma Lagerloef, and Ellen Key in Sweden; Isabella Kaiser and Adele Huguenin in Switzerland; and Carmen Sylva in Roumania.

The causes of this tremendous growth of feminism in literature, it is altogether unnecessary to discuss here. We must leave such matters to sociologists and psychologists. Suffice it to say that certain important economic changes, such as the invention of machinery and the general modern tendency toward urbanization, which have taken woman out of the seclusion of the home into business, higher education, the professions, and politics, have likewise given her a footing in the world of letters. So in general we may say that women are becoming writers for the same reason that they are becoming clerks, stenographers, sanitary policemen, lawyers, legislators, college professors, or clergymen. But, you may say, feminism is gaining much more ground in literature than in certain other fields—science, for instance. Unquestionably! But let us consider that matter a little later.

Meanwhile we may very well speculate as to the possible results of this new movement. Absurd as it may seem, one is sometimes prone, in view of present tendencies, to dream of the time when the male writer will be as thoroughly obsolete as the Inquisition, mediaeval armor, the sedan-chair, or the powdered wig. Indeed, if one has a fairly active imagination, one may fancy the schoolmistress of the twenty-fifth

century saying to her pupils: "Yes, Arnold Bennett and William Watson were their real names. Back in the twentieth century, you see, men wrote some of the novels and poetry; and only a couple of centuries earlier, nearly all literature was produced by men."

Jesting aside, however, what will be the result if feminism continues to assume a greater and greater relative importance in our literature? Will it be merely an interesting phenomenon, with no more practical bearing upon life than the shape of a fern or the color of a robin's egg; or will it change radically the character of our poetry and our fiction, our essays and our other works of literature? The answer to this question must, I think, be largely psychological; and here we may revert to the query: Why is feminism gaining more ground in literature than in certain other fields?

In some lines of activity, feminism has never taken a firm hold and never will take a firm hold. For very good physical reasons, women will never make up the rank and file of our armies, man our battleships, compose our league baseball teams, or fight our prize-fights. And for equally good, if less obvious, psychological reasons, women are unlikely to supersede men as bankers and merchants and civil engineers, or even as butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers. That there is such a thing as sex temperament is a proposition which has long ago passed from the theoretical to the axiomatic stage. As Professor George Trumbull Ladd remarks (*Psychology, Descriptive and Explanatory*, p. 653): "The sexual differences, on the psycho-

logical side, are as minute, pervasive, and influential as on the anatomical and physiological side." And as Professor Edward Alsworth Ross has pointed out (*Social Psychology*, p. 17), women are more suggestible and more emotional than men. Is not this but another way of saying that women are more graphic, less logical; more concrete, less abstract; more sympathetic, less businesslike; more artistic, less scientific, than men? To quote Professor Ladd once more (p. 651): "There may be said to be a distinctively *poetic*, or—to use Lotze's word—'sentimental' temperament. The sentimental temperament is characteristically more feminine than masculine." Now it requires comparatively little imagination, and practically no sentiment or emotion, to build a bridge or to determine the area of an oblate spheroid; but it requires an abundance of all of these qualities to paint a picture or to write a poem. But what of this? Well, the fact that in our co-educational colleges and universities an overwhelming majority of the students in science are males and a clear majority of the students in English literature are females depends, I believe, upon something far more fundamental than an accident imposed by tradition. To the end of time the average young man will be more interested in logarithms than in prosody, and the average young woman will be more inspired by Shelley or Tennyson than by calculus or chemistry.

And what does this presage? To prophesy or even dream of the ultimate extinction of the genus *scriptor masculinus* would be, as I have already indicated,

exceedingly rash. Yet certain clear signs point to the possible advent of an era when literature will be considered as peculiarly a woman's function as darning stockings, working embroidery, or making chocolate fudge. That Homer, Vergil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Balzac, and nearly all the other great writers of the past were men proves nothing. It simply means that literature had to be produced, and that inasmuch as neither tradition nor training fitted women for literary pursuits, the men had to do the producing. Whatever one may think of the outcome of the new feminist movement in our literature, there is certainly nothing to warrant the assertion that the greatness of Homer and the rest of the geniuses I have mentioned was due to their sex. They may all of them have been great scientists or soldiers or merchant princes gone wrong. Wonderful as are "The Iliad", "Hamlet", "Paradise Lost", and "Faust", no one will maintain that they are the greatest writings which it is possible for human beings to produce. Perhaps the most characteristic of all poems or romances is yet to have its birth—in the brain of some inspired woman.

And if it so be, it is well. For nobly as men have wrought with the pen, they have, after all, been sorry bunglers. Fancy, for a moment, the young married man who is left at home alone for a few days, his wife and maid-servant having gone away on a short vacation. He gropes about from pantry to cellar, and from cupboard to china-closet, in a half dazed, altogether confused manner. His wife has told him where to find things, but he remembers the location of scarcely

a single article. He tries clumsily, by turns, to make his bed, cook something edible for lunch, and set the table. He is a half humorous, half pathetic figure. But he is neither more humorous nor more pathetic than a Dickens trying to be as emotional as a woman, or a Cooper trying to interpret woman-nature. The feminist movement in literature is still very young, but its peculiarly strong significance is becoming more and more evident. Even now, whenever we wish to prove that a realist does not have to be a pessimist, we cite a woman, George Eliot, as the supreme evidence. And it required a woman, Josephine Preston Peabody, to demonstrate that an American play can be truly literary and actable at the same time. Why, then, may we not confidently declare that the great hope for literature in the future lies in feminism? Perhaps we are yet to see the advent of a supreme woman literary genius, a genius more remarkable than the world has yet known, a genius having the emotional warmth and tender sympathies of a Dickens, without his bathos; the microscopically accurate insight of a Thomas Hardy, without his gloom or cynicism; the fervid passion of a Swinburne, without his Pagan sensuality; the comprehensive human breadth of a Shakespeare, with some additional merits all her own. Who shall assert that the new feminist movement in literature is merely a phase of the general emancipation of woman from her ancient bondage, meaning everything to woman and nothing to literature? Who shall say that it is not infinitely more: the emancipation of literature from the crudeness of masculinity?

## MADISON CAWEIN

THE old adage about the prophet without honor in his own country seldom applies in the South.

In general, that section of our country acclaims her literary men; as well as her other celebrities, with peculiar loyalty, peculiar pride. It was scarcely four years ago, if memory errs not, that Southern critics from Baltimore to El Paso, from Dallas to Jacksonville, were chiding Professor Brander Matthews for his shameful damning-with-faint-praise of writers born south of Mason and Dixon's Line. Yet I am persuaded that the South does not begin to appreciate one of her most gifted sons, the foremost American poet of our generation, the lamented Madison Cawein.

An estimate of a recently deceased author should, I suppose, have a great deal to say about that author's personality. Unfortunately, however, I do not feel qualified to offer much testimony regarding the personality of Cawein. For a brief time several years ago I had some correspondence with him, and on one happy occasion I had the pleasure and honor of conversing with him; but Cawein reminiscences I must leave to those who knew the beloved Kentucky singer well. One thing I will venture, though; and that is that even slight acquaintance with him revealed his proverbial modesty. Cawein was an unassuming man, and thereby hangs more than one interesting tale. One of the most charming of these little incidents is related by a close lifelong friend of the poet's. Cawein sadly

underrated some of his best work, and on one occasion he was about to destroy a particularly fine lyric. The lyric was rescued in the nick of time and published without the author's knowledge; and so completely had Cawein allowed the piece to pass from his mind that when he saw it in print he did not recognize it as the child of his own fancy.

But though Madison Cawein depreciated some of his best poems, he seldom made the mistake, all too common among poets, of considering his bad verse good. True, he was prone to overestimate his epic powers—he looked upon his ponderous, tedious “Ac-colon of Gaul” as one of his supreme masterpieces;—but, all in all, he had an exceedingly good knowledge of his limitations. To appreciate this fact, one has but to note the uniform technical excellence of Cawein's work.

Much has been written about Madison Cawein—so much, indeed, that one who attempts to add a few words must guard against the danger of wearying the reader with threadbare truisms. Cawein's amazing fecundity, his irresistible tunefulness, his broad range, his ardently romantic imagination, his human sympathies, his dramatic powers, his intense love for his craft, and his tremendous influence upon the lesser poets of his day—these are facts of such ancient repute that we must not tarry with them here.

A thing not nearly so well known about Cawein is that he was an adept in handling the sort of humorous dialect verse that we associate most closely with the name of James Whitcomb Riley. Cawein seldom



wrote in this vein; but when he did, it was with the touch of a master. A few stanzas of "Corncob Jones, An Oldham-County Weather Philosopher" will prove this:

"Who is Corncob Jones?" you say.  
Beatingest man and talkingest:  
Talk and talk th' enduring day,  
Never even stop to rest,  
Keep on talking that a-way,  
Talk you dead, or do his best.

We were there in that old barn,  
Loafing round and swapping lies:  
There was Wiseheart, talking corn,  
Me and Raider boosting ryes,  
When old Corncob sprung a yarn  
Just to give us a surprise.

"Why, as I have said tofore,"  
(Here he aimed a streak of brown  
At a hornet on the floor,  
Got him too) "you put hit down  
To experience, nothin' more,—  
Whut they call hit there in town.

"Natur' jest rubs in the thing—  
Jest won't let a man ferget:  
Keeps hit up spring arter spring—  
Why?—Jest 'cause now you kin bet,  
Blamed blackberries bloom, by Jing!  
They jest need the cold and wet."

Let me return, however, to more salient points. Let me dwell, at more length, upon two items which are perhaps quite as obvious, quite as widely recognized

as any which I have mentioned. One reason, in my opinion, why Cawein is bound to go down in literary history as one of our most considerable American bards is that he had profound and wholesome respect for the standard poetic forms. Long after erudite students shall have ceased to worry their brains about the conceits of Donne and Herbert and Crashaw; long after most of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" have grown sere and have returned unto dust; long, long after men have forgotten that some flowing-haired, horn-spectacled critic once pronounced Ezra Pound wonderful, or that Ezra Pound ever lived and moved and had his being, a grateful public will rejoice that Madison Cawein sat at the feet of Milton the Stately, and Keats the Lovely, and hearkened not to the clanging cymbals of some freakish innovator, some stridently clamorous mountebank outside the gates of the sacred temple of Poesy. Cawein carved not with fragile implements. The ancient and honorable sonnet and the everlasting iambus were among his chief working-tools. And why should it not be so? Why, in the name of Common Sense, should a poet seek for new mediums of expression, when with the old he could sing so beautifully as thus?—

This is the tomboy month of all the year,  
     March, who comes shouting o'er the winter hills,  
     Waking the world with laughter, as she wills,  
 Or wild halloos, a windflower in her ear.  
 She stops a moment by the half-thawed mere  
     And whistles to the wind, and straightway shrills  
     The hyla's song, and hoods of daffodils  
 Crowd golden 'round her, leaning their heads to hear.

Then through the woods that drip with all their eaves,  
Her mad hair blown about her, loud she goes  
Singing and calling to the naked trees,  
And straight the oilets of the little leaves  
Open their eyes in wonder, rows on rows,  
And the first bluebird bugles to the breeze.

Or thus:

I took the road again last night  
On which my boyhood's hills look down;  
The old road leading from the town,  
The village there below the height,  
Its cottage homes, all huddled brown,  
Each with its blur of light..

The old road, full of ruts, that leads,  
A winding streak of limestone-grey,  
Over the hills and far away;  
That's crowded here by arms of weeds  
And elbows of rail-fence, asway  
With flowers that no one heeds:

The cricket and the katydid  
Pierced silence with their stinging sounds;  
The firefly went its golden rounds,  
Where, lifting slow one sleepy lid,  
The baby rosebud dreamed; and mounds  
Of lilies breathed half-hid.

The white moon waded through a cloud,  
Like some pale woman through a pool:  
And in the darkness, close and cool  
I felt a form against me bowed,  
Her breast to mine; and deep and full  
Her maiden heart beat loud.

But the most important fact about Cawein is, I think, that he was a great nature poet, the greatest that his country has yet produced. When we mention the poetry of Bryant and Emerson, our first thought is of nature; yet how slight, how general is most of their nature poetry compared with Cawein's! And what other American nature poet dare we mention in the same breath with Cawein? Every season of the year, every mood of earth and sky, well-nigh every bird and flower and weed of his native Kentucky was so beautiful to him as to be celebrated in song. No one denies Cawein's love for the little things of nature, his marvelously close observation, his minute accuracy of description. Indeed, some have charged that he peered too closely, that he crowded his canvas too full of rank undergrowth, that he made his picture as bewilderingly prolix and as wearisomely prosy as the index to a treatise on botany or ornithology. But they who make this charge know not whereof they speak. Ten to one, they have never learned to love and reverence Nature herself. Doubtless they and their ilk would be happier with Dryden than with Keats, more contented in a drawing-room at any season or hour than in Arcadia on the loveliest morning God ever made.

A few days ago I casually thumbed a volume of Cawein. It was like the calling of a thousand pleasant voices from pasture and woodland and roadside and farm. Now the whippoorwill and the sheepbells welcomed me, and a lamp was lit in some distant farmhouse. Now it was August, oppressive with dust and drought, ragweed and browned meadows. Now a

clear pool with speckled trout invited me. Now the scene changed to winter, stern with yelling winds and smothered white fields. And anon I passed a deserted saw-mill, a lonely, cabinless chimney, a broken gate, and a dilapidated picket-fence, all starred with morning-glories and sweet-potato blossoms. "The same old pictures again and again and again!" you cry perchance. Yes, yes; I'll grant you that! And why not? Does an operatic air lose its tunefulness by recurring twice or thrice? Is the night less lovely for having ten thousand stars instead of one? Is the rosebush less sweet because of its hundred roses?

Say that Madison Cawein was sometimes artificial and often commonplace. Charge him with being too hasty, too prolific, too repetitious. Point out his inferiority, as a philosopher, to at least a score of other American bards past and present. But verily, if you know Cawein and nature well, you will never dream of denying that he was a consummate painter of rural scenes. And though he may have taken you on a dozen entrancing journeys to Fairyland; though he may often have delighted your soul with smooth numbers and easy rimes, though he may even have comforted you with some homely bit of healthy optimism; your happiest remembrance of him, I dare say, will be that he taught you to approach Nature, advancing with awakened senses and open heart.

## LOPSIDED REALISM

**W**HAT is wrong with present-day American fiction? It will scarcely be disputed, I think, that now, after more than a century of constant effort, we Americans are without a novelist equal to the greatest Victorian English writers of fiction. Indeed, we may go a step farther and assert that we have failed to improve upon the work of our own nineteenth-century fiction writers, Hawthorne, Bret Harte, and Mark Twain.

And why? Surely, if we analyze the situation we shall see many reasons why American fiction to-day should surpass the best fiction which the English language has produced in the past. Our growth from national youth to national maturity, our ever widening field of material, the many lessons of the past, the greatly increased facilities for the study of literary technique—these and a score of like circumstances should give us greater fiction than we have ever had before.

Yet where are our twentieth-century American Dickenses, Thackerays, and George Eliots? What novel written in this country within the past fifteen years bids fair to take its permanent place beside "David Copperfield", "Vanity Fair", "Adam Bede", or—to go back two or three generations further—"Pride and Prejudice", "Mansfield Park", or "Tom Jones"? What four living American novelists can vie with such British contemporaries, even, as John Galsworthy,

Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and Hugh Walpole? The most optimistic admirer of present-day American fiction will, I daresay, fear to attempt an answer to these questions.

An excuse frequently offered for our dearth of important novels is that public taste is bad—in other words, that the work of such writers as Gene Stratton Porter, Harold Bell Wright, Robert W. Chambers, Edna Ferber, Anna Katharine Green, and others of their ilk easily outsells the most meritorious fiction on the market. But this is not nearly so good an excuse as it might at first seem to be. Public taste has never been a whit better than it is now. Witness, as proof of this, the tremendous vogue of Mary J. Holmes, Augusta Evans Wilson, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, "The Duchess", Charlotte M. Braeme, May Agnes Fleming, E. P. Roe, James Payn, and numerous other American and English best-sellers of half a century ago.

A second and more plausible excuse offered for the failure of American fiction is that the past twenty-five or thirty years has seen the production of altogether too much commonplace realism. And those who advance this excuse are doubtless prepared to train their most deadly guns against such writers as Mr. Howells, Mrs. Wilkins-Freeman, Miss Alice Brown, and the late Sarah Orne Jewett. In the final analysis, however, can it be claimed that these charming writers have retarded the progress of American fiction? Doubtless they have done much that was hardly worth doing. Doubtless they have often caused us to exclaim: "Very true and very beautiful! but what of it?" On

the whole, however, these so-called "commonplace realists" have done so much that is fresh and new and human, have wrought so artistically, that any apologist who cites them as stumbling-blocks in the way of the great American novel is treading on dangerous ground. Indeed, he is inviting a challenge to the difficult task of pointing out better contemporary American fiction writers than the ones whom he condemns.

In response to this challenge our apologist will surely offer the names of Edith Wharton, Robert Grant, Theodore Dreiser, and Robert Herrick. Probably, too, he will speak a good word in behalf of such books as Reginald Wright Kauffman's "House of Bondage" and Louis Joseph Vance's "Joan Thursday".

And here we arrive at the most vital point in the whole situation! The Wharton-Grant-Dreiser-Herrick school is frankly a revolt against what critics have been pleased to call "Mid-Victorian prudishness." With Turgenev, Ibsen, Dostoievski, Flaubert, Zola, Daudet, Sudermann, and other Continentals as their models—not to mention those most un-British of Britishers, Thomas Hardy and George Moore—these later American realists have sought to jar us out of all the self-complacency we ever had. Aided and abetted by such dramatists as Sir Arthur W. Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, and our own Eugene Walter, they have labored right valiantly to convince us that ours is not a sweet, bright land at all; but a land of crime, adultery, white-slavery, industrial oppression, suicide, domestic infelicity and infidelity, and well-nigh everything else



that is bad. Our grandfathers' Colonel Newcomes and our grandmothers' Agnes Wickfields are too absurdly innocent, too hopelessly unsophisticated, if you please! The Reverend Septimus Harding may have lived and moved and had his being in the rarified air of mid-Victorian Barchester; but, bless you! he is far too angelic for twentieth-century America. Dinah Morris may have graced Loamshire a century ago, but the atmosphere which we are called upon to breathe would undoubtedly poison her instantly. Such heroes and heroines as these have no place in our sterner realism. Instead, we are treated to a much more stirring spectacle: the sinful mistress of a drunken, bestial consort; a loathsome inebriate beating and kicking his pregnant wife, with hideous consequences to the offspring; a silly girl who wakes to find herself a prisoner in a house of ill fame; a miserable bastard hounded to suicide by the slings and arrows of a convention-bound society; a social climber eager to sell herself body and soul for a little more prestige; a scheming financier who robs his employer and violates the chastity of that employer's daughter; a man who finds it better to die with another woman than to live with his invalid wife; a nurse who calmly puts a suffering rival out of her misery.

And alas for the chicken-hearted reader who is nauseated by this spectacle! Alas for him who cries out with poor old Lear, "An ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination!" This generation, we are told, is a truth-loving generation, and must have the whole truth, however much it may hurt.

But here let us pause and proceed to satisfy ourselves on one point. As regards this stern truth, is it, in the largest sense, truth at all? If I photograph Farmer Brown's pig-sty and label it "a typical scene on Mr. Brown's farm," am I altogether just to the good farmer? If I publish a photograph of Whitechapel or Houndsditch, and place under it the inscription, "A representative London thoroughfare," am I more truthful than if I had done the same with Piccadilly or Regent Street? Has an ash-pile or a garbage-heap necessarily more artistic value, even in prose, than a lilac-bush or a pansy-bed?

Before we attempt to answer these questions let us remind ourselves that the foremost Victorian novels are nothing if not typical. They are great because they are broadly human, and they are broadly human because they present in a comprehensive manner that which is truly representative. From them we learn not simply one phase of Victorian life, but all of the most characteristic phases. We learn that the typical Victorian had some foibles—and a great many good qualities. We learn that he was sometimes given to inebriety and gambling, snobbishness and false ambition, immorality and crime; but that more frequently he found pleasure in the more wholesome occupations of hunting and fishing, coaching and driving, tea and cribbage, balls and operas. We learn, above all, that he was a highly domesticated being, generally pure and chivalrous in his relations with women.

The question arises, now: Are we so much baser, so much more degraded than the Victorians were? Let

us see. With an annual divorce rate of about seventy-five per hundred thousand population; with an annual illegitimate birth rate of not more than twenty per hundred thousand population; with a yearly suicide toll of perhaps fifteen thousand; and with a total prison population well under the two hundred thousand mark, we may well protest that we are not nearly so black as some of our foremost realists would paint us. In other words, it is the exceptional American, not the average American, who is desperately bad or hopelessly unfortunate.

Some of the captious, of course, will complain that I am deliberately misconceiving and misinterpreting the purpose of art; that art is, above all, a teacher; that the greatest lesson man can learn is that the wages of sin is death; and that we can best teach this lesson, in art as in law, by holding up horrible examples. Someone may even remind me that the most remarkable theologian of our Colonial period had a great deal more to say about sinners in the hands of an angry God than about harps in the hands of angels.

In this connection, we may, I believe, obtain an impressive object lesson from one of the most marvelous of paintings, Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper." Easily the two most striking figures in this wonderful painting are, of course, the Christ and Judas. The face of the one is ineffably sublime; of the other, unspeakably contemptible. Each has tremendous artistic and ethical value. Yet I wonder how many good deeds in a naughty world have been prompted by the revolting spectacle of Judas. I wonder whether it is

not true that for every soul turned from sin by the unlovely picture of the betrayer, a hundred have been inspired to noble deeds by the countenance of the Master. Is not art, after all, more positive than negative? Is not this thing which some of us have been terming "Victorian prudishness" more properly termed "Victorian wholesomeness"?

Let us have done with this lopsided realism which has floated northward across the English Channel, and westward across the Atlantic during the past generation, and has made many wiseacres think that no other realism is genuine. Let us refuse as steadfastly as ever to turn our backs in good old Hopkinson Smith fashion against all manner of unpleasantness. Ay, let us continue to be frank. But let us also be sane. Let us have true perspective. Give us a few Little Em'lys and Hetty Sorrels—even as life gives them—but keep these unfortunate creatures as wisely in the background as the broadly comprehensive Victorians kept them.

In turning from the sordid, narrow realism which has straitened American fiction too long, we naturally look for signs of something bigger, broader, better. Depressed by incessant gloom, we look eagerly for a patch of blue sky. We look for a type of narrative art which, while facing courageously and honestly the disagreeable facts of life, yet feels that life is, in the final analysis, eminently worth living—that God's in His heaven and all's right with the world. We seek for an art which is neither mean nor commonplace, neither putrid nor sappy. And we do not seek in vain.

True, all of the American novelists whom I would

name as auguries of a bright, new day have their pronounced limitations. Mrs. Deland, for instance, shows too much artistic sameness—seldom wanders far enough away from her beloved Old Chester. Mr. Tarkington, until the advent of that admirable piece, "The Turmoil", has always been a bit too trivial and much too melodramatic. Mr. Churchill is ever too diffuse and sometimes intolerably didactic. And Mr. Henry Sydnor Harrison tries so hard to be clever that often he is not clever at all. Yet this notable quartet have the true gift and the true spirit. And there are others worthy of serious consideration. James Lane Allen, George W. Cable, Dorothy Canfield, John Fox Jr., Zona Gale, Hamlin Garland, Ellen Glasgow, Will N. Harben, Mary Johnston, the late S. Weir Mitchell, Arnold Mulder, James Oppenheim, Thomas Nelson Page, Georgia Wood Pangborn, Georg Schock, Mary S. Watts, and Owen Wister—each of these has contributed something, in a sanely catholic way, to modern American realism. The situation is far from hopeless. If one but looks in the right direction, what an abundance of good story-telling one finds! What a wealth of vivid background, clearcut characterization, and dramatic power! Above all, what a broad, wholesome, life-like blending of the pleasant and the unpleasant, the joyous and the sad, the noble and the ignoble!

The stage is well set for the entrance of the Great American Novel. The lesser Thespians, Trivial Realism and Sordid Realism, have well-nigh done with their strutting. The half-gods are about to go. And

right well have they played their little part. They have taught us candor and technique, at any rate. The player who is about to enter will be more concise and precise than the Victorians were. Indeed, the too-copious sentimentalism of Dickens, the over-subjectivity of Thackeray, and the clumsy circumlocution of George Eliot have already made their exit. Our new player will be guided by the artistic economy and straightforwardness of the Continentals and Mr. Hardy and Mrs. Wharton. But for scope and perspective and philosophy of life, he will revert to those good old side-whiskered prigs and hoop-skirted prudes whom we have despised too long.

## IS OUR LITERATURE STILL ENGLISH?

WHEN we ask the question, Is our literature still English? we tacitly admit, by the use of the word *still*, that heretofore our literature has been strikingly English. And the obvious fact which compels this admission is a great deal more surprising than it would, at first glance, appear to be.

We occasionally speak of England as our mother country, and we often refer loosely to ourselves as an Anglo-Saxon nation; but when we remember that America was first discovered by Norsemen and later by Italians and Spaniards; that from the very earliest Colonial times it has counted Dutch, Germans, Swedes, and French among important elements in its population; and that it now is the foster-mother of practically every race and nation under the sun—our words about our Anglo-Saxon origin and make-up lose much of their significance. In whatever sense England may have been our mother between 1607 and 1776, we have, in most respects, wandered far from the proverbial maternal apron-strings. Not content with our declaration of July 4, 1776, we have been declaring and re-declaring our independence in a hundred ways ever since. We have isolated and fortified ourselves with a Monroe Doctrine and a protective tariff; established an educational system which is more German than English, and more American than either; welcomed Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, Slav and Teuton, Celt and Latin, to our shores on equal terms. English

conservatism and reverence for tradition; English caution and reticence; English pride in family trees; English patience and courtesy and gentleness—these are things which we Americans despise with almost vandalic aversion.

Yet the most cursory glance will show us that, so far as literature is concerned, we have been, throughout our colonial and national existence, remarkably English. It will convince us that the country which ruled us for a century and three quarters, and which gave us a permanent national language, has likewise insisted that we share with her a common literature. Our earliest American writers were nothing more nor less than Englishmen sojourning in the new country, and they had precisely the same right to be termed *American*, as had Charles Dickens, when he wrote *Martin Chuzzlewit*, or Mr. Arnold Bennett, when he produced *Your United States*. Furthermore, nearly every American work ever published prior to the nineteenth century was written in New England or in Virginia. If one looks for the history of early Dutch literature in New York, early Swedish literature in Delaware, early German literature in Pennsylvania, or early French literature in the Middle or Southern states, one literally stares at blank pages. Our Colonial annals furnish no parallel to the French literature of Canada, the French and Italian literature of Switzerland, the Flemish literature of Belgium, the Polish literature of Russia, or the Slavonic literature of Austria-Hungary. Even when New England and the South ceased to have a monopoly on American authors,



we still find practically all of our writing done by the descendants of Englishmen. The only great man of letters produced by Colonial Pennsylvania, for instance, was not a German; but Benjamin Franklin, a simon-pure New England Yankee. And if we look to Dutch New Jersey during the same period, we find a single noteworthy name, that of John Woolman, an English Quaker. Indeed, the only prominent non-British names to be found in American literature before the year 1800 are Philip Freneau and Hector St. Jean Crevecoeur, and both these writers used the English language as their medium of expression.

Moreover, our early national literary history is but a repetition of the same old tale. During the first half century of our existence as an independent nation nearly one million aliens came to our shores, and of these newcomers a very large proportion were non-English-speaking people. From the very close of the Revolution to the present time, we have steadily grown less and less Anglo-Saxon in blood. But let us make a list of the chief American writers of the nineteenth century. Such list must include the names of Brown, Drake, Halleck, Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Alcott, Fuller, Emerson, Stowe, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Prescott, Motley, Parkman, Taylor, Poe, Simms, Timrod, Hayne, Lanier, Stedman, Harte, Aldrich, Clemens, and Howells. Yet how many of these thirty names would sound essentially foreign to a British ear? Absolutely none but the two names Lanier and Thoreau. And it should not be forgotten that the Laniers, though obviously of French origin,

became thoroughly Anglicized by a long residence in England many generations before the birth of Sidney Lanier.

In view of these facts, is it any wonder that Andrew Lang made so bold as to regard our literature as a sort of colonial branch of English literature, belonging in the same category as the writings of Canada and Australia? Is it any wonder that Mr. John Macy, at the beginning of his *Spirit of American Literature*, dogmatically declares American literature to be "a branch of English literature, as truly as are English books written in Scotland or South Africa"?

In an article in *Harper's* for March, 1913, Professor Thomas R. Lounsbury calls attention to the prediction once made that the language of America would one day be markedly different from that of Britain. This prophecy seems now, in the light of actual history, as absurd as it must have seemed natural and plausible when it was made.

Several years ago on a transatlantic liner, the writer chanced to overhear an animated colloquy between a cocksure Englishman and a bumptious German-American. The Englishman, it appeared, had been trying to prove that America was indebted to the mother country for practically everything, from government to dinner-jackets. And the German-American was insistent that we owed practically nothing to England—not even our language. "We don't speak English," he declared; "we speak United States." "But, I say," replied the Englishman with quiet sarcasm, "your blooming United States, in spite

of all its faults—its beastly burr and old-maid ‘ants’ and ‘toons’ and ‘dooties’—is a jolly close imitation of English.”

In the foregoing argument Percy certainly had the better of Hans. English, as our national vernacular, has come to stay. No thinking person doubts that now. And the past has indeed given us reason to wonder whether our literature may not be as permanently English as is our language. Yet the present is fraught with many new signs—many signs which make us persist in the query: Is our literature still English?

With a million foreigners entering our country annually (less than one-sixth of whom are natives of English-speaking territory); with fourteen per cent of our total population foreign-born; with an additional twenty-one per cent born of foreign parents; and with an overwhelming majority of our people partially or wholly Continental in descent, we have abundant reason to look for the outcropping of strikingly un-English traits in our literature.

Attention has been called to the dearth of non-British names among American authors, both Colonial and nineteenth-century. For the sake of comparison, it might be well to look at a few familiar contemporary American literary names—such names as Van Dyke, Repplier, Bynner, Guiterman, Cawein, Roosevelt, Oppenheim, Dreiser, Kauffman, Neihardt, Knoblauch, Santayana, Schauffler, Viereck, Benét, Hagedorn, and Untermeyer. Obviously, if there is anything in a surname, we Americans are no longer dependent solely upon Anglo-Saxons for our literature.

But we must get at more vital matters. We must see whether or not our literature itself is actually undergoing marked changes which tend to brand it as increasingly un-English. To reach any definite conclusions in this matter, we shall find it necessary to consider two things: subject-matter, and method of treatment.

Of course, it is very easy to point out that we have always had authors who have shown certain un-English characteristics, both in matter and in manner. For example, it is perfectly evident that such themes as the Indians of J. Fenimore Cooper and William Gilmore Simms, the prairies of Francis Parkman, the quaint Dutch-American characters of Washington Irving, and the fiery anti-slavery tirades of John G. Whittier could never have derived their inspiration from the British Isles. And to a close student, a subtle analyst, it is equally evident that the bald, bare moralizing which Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell frequently indulged in would differentiate each of them sharply from any English Victorian poet. But, certainly, Indians and prairies are as typically Canadian as they are American, and the moralizing bent of our nineteenth century New England bards may be traced directly to ancestors of pure English stock. Moreover, even when Washington Irving is dealing with Dutch-Americans, he is so patently Anglo-Saxon in his viewpoint that he might as well be an Englishman patronizingly interpreting the life and customs of Holland. Truly, the Anglophobe who surveys American literary history of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries finds scant cause for rejoicing.

Turning, now, from the past to the present, we must bear in mind that we are not concerned with the questions: Is our literature improving? or, Is our literature becoming more distinctively American? We are simply concerned with the query: Is our literature still *English*?

To the person who would answer this last-mentioned question affirmatively let me suggest a brief survey of backgrounds. Let me suggest a glance at the cosmopolitan East Side characters of the late Myra Kelly, the Jews of James Oppenheim, the Italians of T. A. Daly, the Pennsylvania Germans of Georg Schock and Helen R. Martin, the Louisiana French of George W. Cable, and the Michigan Dutch of Arnold Mulder. Here, surely, we have half a dozen backgrounds which are as un-English as they can be.

When we pass from subject-matter to technique, we are treading on dangerous ground; for we are raising a number of rather difficult questions. Can English literature be classed as a definite entity, sharply distinguished from the various kinds of Continental literature? Taking such catalogue as a criterion, can we find a sharp line of cleavage between English and American literature? If there is such thing as a distinctively Continental technique, is that technique followed more by non-English American writers than by American writers of prevailingly English stock? Is a tendency to follow Continental methods necessarily resultant from the fact that the Continental elements in our population are becoming relatively stronger and stronger numerically?

It would be folly to declare that any of these questions can be answered with absolute finality; but one can, at least, bring forth certain facts which bear closely upon the questions.

In the first place, it is fairly safe to assert that there has been, in the history of the English literature, one period which may be regarded as more typically English than any other. Assuredly, that period was not the Elizabethan period, with its strikingly un-English, almost Celtic exhilaration, volubility, lack of reticence. Nor was it the Jacobean period, with its strange, abnormal contrast of somber Puritanism and rollicking libertinism. Nor was it the Classical period, with its thoroughly un-English grossness, soullessness, artificiality, hatred of democracy, and contempt for nature. Nor, yet, was it the Romantic period, with its well-nigh Oriental delight in the wild, the remote, the improbable, the gaudy. It must, therefore, by the process of elimination, have been the Victorian period, that period during which the liberty-loving Anglo-Saxon race made its greatest developments along the lines of democracy.

How, then, may the Victorian period be characterized? What traits may be safely set down as typically Victorian? In attempting an answer, we shall do well to consider the poetry of that arch-Victorian, Tennyson, whom minor contemporaries followed to a remarkable degree, and with whom even Browning and the Pre-Raphaelites had much in common. Undeniably Tennyson—together with a clear majority of his fellow-Victorians—evinced such

marked qualities as a correctness of form, a spirit of scientific accuracy, a tendency toward religious and philosophic questioning, a willingness for gradual change (change which broadens down "from precedent to precedent"), a distaste for things ugly or repulsive, a provincially English mental attitude, and a comparative indifference to the remote past. Add to these qualities the things which the three leading Victorian novelists, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot, possessed in common: a thoroughly subjective point of view (in contradistinction to Continental objectivism); an accompanying tendency to intersperse one's story with philosophic moralizing and general "editorial comment"; and, finally (in contrast to relentless Continental naturalism), a bent for tingeing all realism with the idealistic. And here you have the quintessence of Victorianism. Here you have certain definite strata which run through the English literature of all time, underlying the surface differences of Elizabethanism, Classicism, Romanticism, twentieth-century-ism, and so forth. Here you have a tolerably correct differentiation of the literature of Britain from that of the Continent.

A comparison of English and American literature is now in order. At this point we encounter plenty of difficulties; for American literature is so heterogeneous, so sectional, so lacking in traits that are peculiarly national, that it defies a comprehensive definition. Nevertheless, our writers from New England to the Pacific coast, and from the Gulf of Mexico to the lakes, show a few common tendencies so marked that

we have a certain criterion, after all. Take, for instance, the New England stories of Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman, the Southern stories of Thomas Nelson Page, the New York stories of Edith Wharton, and the Western stories of Hamlin Garland and Owen Wister. Their striking objectivism will become entirely obvious, if we compare them with Victorian fiction, or if we compare them with the fiction of such present-day English writers as Mrs. Ward, Hewlett, De Morgan, Locke, and even Bennett. To be specific, note the difference between Mrs. Wharton's impartial, reportorial, objective way of telling a tale, and the impertinent comment which Thomas Hardy makes about the Immortals at the end of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Take the gloomy, over-sexed plays of Eugene Walter, of the late Clyde Fitch, and of numerous lesser American dramatists, and if you would find an English parallel to them, you will be almost obliged to turn to the problem plays of Sir Arthur Pinero,—who, by the way, is not a Briton at all, but the son of a Portuguese Jew. Take the "challenge" poetry of Louis Untermeyer, the whimsical poetry of Vachel Lindsay and John Hall Wheelock, and the futurist poetry of Ezra Pound and all his ilk; and where shall you find anything approaching an English counterpart? Where, indeed? Perhaps in the buried annals of Pre-Raphaelitism; possibly, to a small degree, in Masfield, Yeats, and D. H. Lawrence; certainly not in such characteristic twentieth-century English poets as Kipling, Watson, Noyes, Binyon, Newbolt, Drinkwater, or Davies.



This brings us back to our third question: Is Continental technique followed more by non-English American writers than by American writers of pre-vaillingly English stock? This, I should say, is a well-nigh futile question. Doubtless it is true that Whitman, who was partly Dutch in blood, was far more Continental, far less English, in spirit and in method, than was Lowell, who was of pure Anglo-Saxon stock. But, on the other hand, it is equally true that Robert Herrick, a present-day writer of English descent, is essentially Continental in technique; whereas Henry Van Dyke, a contemporary of Dutch stock, has imbibed as much of the spirit of Victorian English literature as has perhaps any living American author.

Now we come to our final question: Is a tendency to follow Continental methods necessarily resultant from the fact that the Continental elements in our population are becoming relatively stronger and stronger numerically? Whether one answers this question affirmatively or negatively, one can at least assert that two facts stand out side by side: first, that the American race is much more Continental than it was fifty years ago; and secondly, that the same is true of American literature. The first of these two facts is a matter of simple figures; and as regards the second—it will scarcely be denied, for instance, that Hawthorne's *Arthur Dimmesdale* is far more English in temperament and in attitude toward life than is Theodore Dreiser's *Frank Calderwood*. And further support for this point will be found in what I have already indicated regarding the essentially English characteristics to be

found in the work of such nineteenth-century American writers as Cooper, Simms, Parkman, Irving, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell; and the undeniably non-English characteristics evinced by such twentieth-century writers as Mrs. Freeman, Mrs. Wharton, Garland, Wister, Fitch, Walter, Untermeyer, Wheelock, Lindsay, and Pound.

I have made no attempt to show that our literature is either improving or becoming more distinctively American. Indeed, in an earlier paragraph I called attention to the fact that this was not the question under discussion in this paper. But the question is, after all, inevitable. A mere shifting of the matter and manner of American literature from the English to the Continental is of slight advantage or consequence if it does not augur a better literature for the future. The significant point, as I see it, is that a breaking away from servile dependence upon the literature of one particular European nation is surely a step toward ultimate independence. If in the past our literature has been inherently English, and if at present it is partially English and partially Continental, there is no reason why in the future it may not be emphatically American.

History does not lack for the precedent of a nation which, depending upon an older nation's language, has nevertheless developed a distinctive literature of its own. There is the wonderful Greek pastoral poetry of ancient Sicily, and the splendid Greek prose of old-time Alexandria. There are the mediæval Latin writers of half a dozen European countries. There is

a Maeterlinck, French in language, but unmistakably Belgian in race and spirit. There is a brilliant Norwegian literature, expressing itself in the Danish language, but, through the agency of such geniuses as Ibsen and Bjornson, rising above the literature of Denmark itself. We need not hang our heads in shame because we have no American language. We need not fear that dependence in language will everlastingly preclude independence in literature. Surely this wonderful cosmopolitan nation of ours—in many respects the most original nation on the globe—cannot forever lack a literature distinctively its own; a literature of peculiar freshness and buoyancy, peculiar vigor and democracy.









